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MIRACLE GOLD

A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"TEMPEST DRIVEN," "THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART," "FATAL
BONDS," ETC., ETC.

TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRYCE.

MIRACLE GOLD

A. BRYCE

RICHARD BOWLING

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MIRACLE GOLD.

CHAPTER I

TOO LATE.

"THE 8.45 for London, miss? Just gone. Gone two or three minutes. It's the last train up to town this evening, miss. First in the morning at 6.15, miss."

"Gone!" cried the girl in despair. She reached out her hand and caught one of the wooden pillars supporting the roof of the little station at Millway, near the south-east coast of England.

"Yes, miss, gone," said the porter. He was inclined to be very civil and communicative, for the last train for London had left, the enquirer seemed in great distress, and she was young and beautiful. "Any luggage, miss? If you have you can leave it in the cloak-room till the first train to-morrow. The first train leaves here at a quarter past six."

She did not speak. She looked up and down the platform, with dazed, bewildered eyes. Her lips were drawn back and slightly parted. She still kept her hand on the wooden pillar. She seemed more afraid of becoming weak than in a state of present weakness.

The porter, who was young and good-looking, and a very great admirer of female charms, thought the girl was growing faint. He said: "If you like, miss, you can sit down in the waiting-room and rest there."

She turned her eyes upon him without appearing to see him, and shook her head in mechanical refusal of his suggestion. She had no fear of fainting. For a moment her mental powers were prostrated, but her physical force

was in no danger of giving way. With a start and a shiver, she recovered enough presence of mind to realize her position on the platform, and the appearance she must be making in the eyes of the polite and well-disposed railway porter.

"Thank you, I have no luggage—with me." She looked around apprehensively, as though dreading pursuit.

"Would you like me to call a fly for you, miss?"

"No. Oh, no!" she cried, starting back from him in alarm. Then seeing the man retire a pace with a look of surprise and disappointment, she added hastily, "I do not want a cab, thank you. It is most unfortunate that I missed the train. Is it raining still?"

"Yes, miss; heavy."

From where she stood she could have seen the rain falling on the metals and ballast of the line; she was absolutely looking through the rain as she asked the question, but she was in that half-awakened condition when one asks questions and hears answers without interest in the one or attention to the other. She knew heavy summer rain was falling and had been falling for more than an hour; she knew that she had walked two miles through the rain with only a light summer cloak and small umbrella to protect her from it, and she knew that she could not use a cab or fly for two reasons; first, she could not spare the money; second, she durst not drive back, if back she must go, for she must return unperceived. When she thought of getting back, and the reason for concealment, an expression of disgust came over her face, and she shuddered as one shudders at a loathsome sight unexpectedly encountered.

The porter lingered in the hope of being of use. He had no mercenary motive. He wanted merely to remain as long as possible near this beautiful girl. He would have done any service he could for her merely that he might come and go near where she stood, within the magic radius of her eyes. Even railway porters, when they are in quiet stations, are no more than other men in the presence of the beauty of woman.

It was almost dark now. Nine o'clock had struck. The straight warm rain was falling through the dusky,

windless air. It was an evening towards the end of June—the last Wednesday of that month. There was not a sound but the dull muffling beat of the rain upon the roof. Not a soul visible but the girl and porter.

She took her hand away from the wooden pillar, and gathered her cloak round her, in preparation for going.

"Can I do anything for you, miss? Have you far to walk?" asked the man. Offering service was the nearest thing he could do to rendering service.

She did not answer his question; she asked instead: "Do you think the rain will stop soon?"

He glanced at the thin line of dull, dark leaden sky, visible from where he stood at a low angle between the roofs of the platform. "No, miss, I don't think it will. It looks as if 'twould rain all night." If she had been a plain girl of the dumpy order, or his own degree, he would have tried to make himself agreeable by prophesying pleasant things. But the high privilege of answering so exquisitely beautiful a young lady demanded a sacrifice of some kind, and he laid aside his desire to be considered an agreeable fellow, and said what he believed to be the truth.

She sighed, moved her shoulders under the cloak to settle it, and saying "Thank you," in a listless, half-awake way, moved with down-dropped eyes and drooping head, slowly out of the station, raised her umbrella and, turning sharply to the left, walked through the little town of Millway and under the hugh beeches of a broad, deserted road leading southward.

The trees above her head were heavy with leaves, the road was very dim, almost dark, this night of midsummer. The perpendicular rain fell unseen through the mute warm evening. A thick perfume of multitudinous roses made the soft air heavy with richness. No sound reached the young girl but the faint clatter of the rain upon the viewless leaves overhead, the pit and splash of the huge drops from the leaves close to her feet, and the wide, even, incessant dull drumming of the shower upon the trees, looming dimly abroad in the vaporous azure dusk of the dark.

After walking a while the girl sighed and paused. Al-

though her pace had not been quick, she felt her breath come short. The mild, moist, scent-laden air seemed too rich for freshening life and cooling the blood. She was tired, and would have liked to sit down and rest, but neither time nor place allowed of pause. She must get on—she must get back as quickly as possible, or she might be too late, too late to regain Eltham House and steal unperceived to her room there. To that hateful Eltham House, under which to-night rested that odious Oscar Leigh. Oscar Leigh, the grinning, bold, audacious man.

Edith Grace turned her attention for a moment away from her thoughts to her physical situation and condition. She listened intently. She heard the patter of the rain near and the murmur of it abroad upon grass and trees. But there was some other sound. A sound nearer still than the patter at her feet, and more loud and distinct, and emphatic and tumultuous, than the roll of the shower far away.

For a while she listened, catching her breath in fear, not knowing what this sound could be. Then she started. It was much nearer than she thought. It was the heavy, fierce, irregular beating of her own heart.

At first she was alarmed by the discovery. She had never felt her heart beat in this way before, except after running when a child. Upon reflection she recollected that nervous excitement sometimes brought on such unpleasant symptoms, and that the best way to overcome the affection was by keeping still and avoiding alarm of any kind. She would stand and, instead of thinking about the unpleasantness and risk of going back to Eltham House, fix her mind upon the events which prompted her flight. She could not hope to keep her mind free from considering her present position, and the occurrences leading to it, but it is less distressing to review the unpleasant past than to contemplate a lowering immediate future.

Owing to the loss of the little money left her by her father, she had been obliged to try and get something to do, as she could not consent to encroach on the slender income of her grandmother, Mrs. Grace, the only relative she had in the world. As she had been so long with Mrs. Grace, she thought the thing to suit her best would be a

companionship to an elderly or invalid lady. She advertised in the daily papers, and the most promising-looking reply came from Mr. Oscar Leigh, of Eltham House, Millway, who wanted a companion for his infirm mother. Mr. Leigh could not give much salary, but if advertiser took the situation, she would have a thoroughly comfortable and highly respectable home. Mr. Leigh could make an appointment for a meeting in London.

The meeting took place at Mrs. Grace's lodgings in Grimsby Street, Westminster, and although Miss Grace shrank from the appearance and manners of Mr. Leigh, she accepted the situation. The poor old grandmother was so much overcome by the notion of impending separation between her and Edith, that she took no particular notice of Mr. Leigh, and looked upon him simply as a man indifferent to her, save that he was arranging to carry beyond her sight the girl she had brought up, and who now stood in the place of her own dead children who had clung to her knees in their curly-headed childhood, grown-up, and long since passed away for ever.

Mr. Oscar Leigh was very short, and had shoulders of unequal height, and a slight hunch on his back. His face was long and cadaverous, and hollow-cheeked. The eyes small and black, and piercingly bright. His expression was saturnine, sinister, cruel; his look at one and the same time furtive and bold. His arms were long to deformity. His hands and fingers long, and thin, and bony, and where they were not covered with lank, shining black hair, they were of a dull brown yellow colour. His teeth were fang-like and yellow. His voice hollow when he spoke low, and harsh when he raised it. His breath came in short gasps now and then, and with sounds, as though it disturbed dry bones in its course. He drooped towards the right side, and carried a short and unusually thick stick, with huge rugged and battered crook. When he stood still for any time, he leant upon this stick, keeping his skinny, greedy, claw-like hand on the crook, and the crook close against his right side. He wore a glossy silk hat, a spotless black frock coat, and moved through a vapour of eau-de-cologne. His feet were large, out of all proportion to the largest man. They were flat, with no insteps, more like a monkey's than

a man's. She would have pitied him only for his impudent glances. She would have loathed him only she could not forget that his deformities were deserving of pity.

"You will have one unpleasantness to endure," he had said. "You will have to make your mind up to one cruel privation." He smiled a hard, cruel, evil smile.

"May I know what my child will have to do without?" asked Mrs. Grace. And then, without waiting for an answer, she said: "I know what I shall have to do without."

"And what is that, madam? What will you have to do without?"

"I shall have to do without *her*."

"Ah, that *would* be a loss," he said, with hideous, offensive gallantry. "You are to be pitied, madam. You are, indeed, to be pitied, madam. Miss Grace will have to make up her mind on her side to do without——"

"Me; I know it," broke in the old woman, bursting into tears.

"Yes, madam; but that is not what I was going to say. I was about to say your grand-daughter will have to do without *me*!" Here he leered at Edith. "I am much occupied with my mechanical studies in London, and am seldom at Eltham House. I hope you may be always able in your heart to do without *me*." He was standing leaning his misshapen, crooked body on his misshapen, crooked stick. He did not move his right hand from his waist, into which it was packed and driven by the weight of his body upon the handle of the stick. He put his long, lean, left, dark hand on his right breast, and bowed low by swinging himself to the right and downward on the crook of his stick. "Miss Grace will see, oh! so little of me," he added, as he rose and looked with his bold eyes at Edith and her grandmother.

"Oh!" cried the unhappy, tactless old woman, "I dare say she can manage that."

"I dare say she can," he said, gazing at Edith with eyes in which boldness and scorn seemed strangely, abominably blended, or rather conflicting.

At the time she felt she could cry for joy at the notion of seeing little of this hideous, deformed, monstrous dwarf.

The bargain was there and then completed, and it had

been arranged that she should go to Eltham House that day week.

This night that was now upon her and around her, this dull, dark, heavy-perfumed, rain-drowned midsummer night, was the night of that day week. Only one week lay between the visit of this hunchback to their place in Grimsby Street, Westminster, and this day. This morning she had left London and seen Millway for the first time in her life. She had got there at noon and driven straight to Eltham House, two miles south of the little coast town. The hire of the cab had made considerable inroad on the money in her pocket. The sum was now reduced to only a few pence more than her mere train fare to London—not allowing even for a cab from Victoria Terminus to Grimsby Street, Westminster. When she got to Victoria she should have to walk home. Oh! walking home through the familiar streets thronged with everyday folk, would be so delightful compared with this bleak, solitary Eltham House, this hideous, insolent, monstrous, deformed dwarf.

It was impossible for her to stay at Eltham House, utterly impossible. This man Leigh had told her he should see little or nothing of her at the place, and yet when she reached the house his was the first face and figure she laid eyes on. He had opened the door for her and welcomed her to Eltham House, and on the very threshold he had attempted to kiss her! Great Heavens! it was incredibly horrible, but it was true! The first man who had ever dared to try to kiss her was this odious beast, this misshapen fiend, this scented monster!

Ugh! The very attempt was degradation.

The girl shuddered and looked around her into the dim, dark gloom abroad, beyond the trees where the grass and corn lay under the invisible sky, and where the darkness of the shadow of trees did not reach.

And yet, when she halted here, she had been on her way back to Eltham House! There was no alternative. She had nowhere else to go. For lack of courage and money she could not venture upon an hotel. She had never been from home alone before, and she felt as if she were in a new planet. She was not desperate, but she was awkward, timid, afraid.

Wet and lonely as the night was, she would have preferred walking about till morning rather than return to that house, if going back involved again meeting that horrible man. At the time she was in the house he had forced his odious, insistent attentions upon her. He had followed her about the passages, and lain in wait for her with expostulations for her prudery in not allowing him to welcome her in patriarchal fashion to his house! Patriarchal fashion, indeed! He had himself said he knew he was not an Adonis, but that he was not a Methuselah either, and his poor, simple, paralysed mother told her he was thirty-five years old. She would not take all the money in the world to stay in a house to which he was free. At eight o'clock that evening she had pleaded fatigue and retired to her own room for the night. She then had no thought of immediate flight. When she found herself alone with the door locked, she thought over the events of the day and her position, and in the end made up her mind to escape and return to town at once, that very evening. She wrote a line to the effect that she was going, and placed it on the dressing-table by the window.

Her room was on the ground-floor, and the window wide open. Mrs. Brown, the only servant at the house, slept not in the house but in the gate lodge. Mrs. Brown had told her the gate was never locked until eleven o'clock, when she locked it before going to bed in the lodge. So that if she got back at any hour before eleven, she could slip in through the gate and get over the low sill of her bedroom window. She could creep in and change her wet boots and clothes and sit up in the easy-chair till morning. Then she could steal away again, walk to the railway station and take the first train for London.

She felt rested and brave now. She would go. Heaven grant she might meet no one on the way!

CHAPTER II.

VOICES OF THE UNSEEN.

EDITH GRACE gathered her cloak around her and began walking once more. The road, under the heavy trees, was now blindly dark. She had taken nothing out of that house but the clothes she wore, not even her dressing bag. In the first place, she had not cared to encumber herself; and, in the second place, if she by chance met Mrs. Brown or Oscar Leigh, she would not appear to be contemplating flight. She could write for her trunk and bag when she found herself safely at home once more.

She was new to the world and affairs. She did not know or care whether her action in leaving Eltham House was legal or not. The question did not arise in her mind. If she had been told she had incurred a penalty, she would have said: "All I own on earth is in that house; but I would forego it all, I would die rather than stay there." If she were asked why, she would have said: "Because that odious, insolent man lied when he said I should see little of him. He was the first person I met. Because he dared—had the intolerable impudence to try and kiss me. Because, having failed in his attempt, he pursued me through the house with his hateful attentions. I am very poor. I am obliged to do something for a living. I am not a cook or a dairymaid. My father was a gentleman, and my mother was a lady. We come of an old Derbyshire family. I am a lady, and you can kill me, but you cannot make me bow my head or shame my blood. If, when he tried to kiss me in the hall, I had had a weapon, I should have stabbed him or shot him. If I had a father or a brother he should be chastised. I know nothing of the law, care nothing for it."

If she had been asked: "Do you think his offence would have been less if you happened to be a cook or a dairymaid?"

She would have answered: "I am not concerned to answer in a purely imaginary case. I am not a cook or a dairymaid. I am a lady. All I know is that attempting to

kiss me was an unpardonable outrage, and if he ventured upon such an attempt again I should kill him if I had a weapon by me. Yes, kill him!"

And now, for want of a few shillings, she was returning to the house from which she had fled in indignation and dread a little while ago. She could not walk about all night in this unknown country. She had not the means to secure accommodation at an hotel. She could not spare money enough even for a cab from the railway station. She had in her pocket no more than her fare to London, and a few odd, useless pennies.

Dark and unfamiliar as the road was to Edith Grace, there was no chance of her losing the way. It was an unbroken line from the little town of Millway to Eltham House. A few by roads right and left made no confusion, for they were at right angles. The road itself was not much frequented by day, and by night was deserted. The heavy rain of the evening kept all folk who had the choice under cover. From the time the girl cleared the straggling outskirts of the town until she gained the high hedge and gateway of her destination she did not meet or overtake a soul. With serious trepidation, she pushed the gate open and entered the grounds. The gate groaned in opening and shutting, and she was thankful that no dog found a roof in that house.

The tiny gate lodge was dark and silent. From this she judged Mrs. Brown had not retired for the night. Mrs. Brown had told her that when Mr. Leigh was not at home, and Mrs. Leigh had no companion, she slept at the house. But that when there was either Mr. Leigh or a companion, she always spent the night in her own little home, the gate lodge. This night Mr. Leigh, his mother, and Mrs. Brown believed a companion and Mr. Leigh would be in the house. Well, there would be, but not exactly as it was designed and believed by them. She had given no word—made no sign that she was leaving. She had found her bed-room window open, and she had not shut it. Owing to the warmth of the night, that fact was of itself not likely to claim attention.

The unshaded carriage-drive from the gate to the house was winding and about a hundred yards long. A straight

line across the ill-kept lawn would not measure more than fifty paces. Edith chose this way because of the silence secured to her footsteps by the grass, and the additional obscurity afforded by its darker colour. In front of the house ran a thick row of trees and evergreen shrubs. So that in daylight, when the trees were in leaf, the ground-floor of the house was hidden from the road, and the road from the ground-floor of the house.

The house itself was of modest appearance and dimensions. In the front stood the porch and door, on each side of which was a window. On the floor above were three windows, and in the roof three dormers. On the right hand of the hall lay the drawing-room, on the left-hand side the dining-room; behind the drawing-room the library, which had been converted into a sleeping chamber for Mrs. Leigh, who, owing to her malady, was unable to ascend the stairs. Behind the dining-room stood the breakfast parlour, which had been converted into a sleeping chamber for Mrs. Leigh's companion, so that the companion might be near Mrs. Leigh in the night time. At the rear of the companion's sleeping chamber was a large conservatory in which the invalid took great delight, seated in her wheeled chair. Behind the library was the kitchen, no higher than the conservatory. The back walls of the breakfast-room and library formed the main wall of the house. The conservatory and kitchen were off-builds, and separated from one another by a narrow flagged yard, in which were a large uninhabited dog kennel, water butts, a pump, and ashbin. Beyond the flagged yard lay a large, neglected vegetable garden. The flower garden spread beneath the conservatory, and on the other side of the house to the right of the kitchen, as one looked from the lawn, languished an uncared-for orchard.

The floor above consisted wholly of bed and dressing-rooms, except the large billiard-room, in which there was no table. Above the first floor nestled a number of attics, for servants and bachelors in emergency. Only two of the bedrooms on the first floor were furnished, and the attic story had been locked up all the time Mrs. Brown acted as lodge-keeper, about five years.

The few people who had ever asked Oscar Leigh why he

kept so large a house for so small a household, were informed by him that it was his white elephant. He had had to take it in lieu of a debt, and he could neither sell nor let it at a figure which would pay him back his money, or fair interest on it. Besides, he said his mother liked it, and it suited him to go there occasionally, and forget the arduous, scientific studies in which most of his days were spent in London.

But very little or nothing of Mr. Oscar Leigh or his affairs was known in Millway. He had no friends or even acquaintances there, and spoke to no one in the town, save the few tradespeople who supplied the household with its modest necessities. Indeed, he came but seldom to his mother's home; not more than once a month, and then his arrival brought no additional custom to the shops of the town, for he generally brought a box or hamper with him full, he told the driver of the fly he hired, of good things from the Great Town. The tradespeople of Millway would gladly have taken more of his money, but they had quite as much of his speech and company as they desired—more than they desired.

Edith Grace walked straight to the left-hand corner of Eltham House, and looked carefully through the trees and shrubs before venturing out on the drive. Not a soul was stirring. She could hear no sound but the rain which still fell in heavy sheets. No light was visible in any room, but whether this was due to the absence of light inside, or to heavy curtains and blinds she could not say. Against the glass of the fan-sash in the porch a faint light, like that of a weak candle or dimmed lamp, gleamed, making a sickly solitary yellow patch upon the black, blank front of the house.

The rain and the soddenness of the gravel were in Edith's favour. The sound of the rain would blunt the sound of her footsteps, and the water among the gravel would lessen the grating of the stones.

She emerged from the cover of the trees, and hastened across the open drive. She gained the left-hand corner of the house, and passed rapidly under the dining-room windows in the left side.

Should she find the sash of her room down? That

would be a distracting discovery. It would mean she should have to pass the night in the open air. That would be bad enough. It would mean that her flight had been discovered already. It might mean that Oscar Leigh was now lying in wait for her somewhere in this impenetrable darkness behind her back. That would be appalling—unendurable. Hurry and see.

Thank heaven, the window was open!

It was much easier to get out through that window than back through it. But at last, after a severe struggle, she found herself in the room. Strange it seemed that she should feel more secure here, under the roof which covered this man, than outside. Yet it was so. He might, in the dark, outside, spring upon her unawares. He looked like a wild beast, like some savage creature that would crouch, and spring, and seize, and rend. Here she felt comparatively safe. The door was locked on the inside. She had locked it on coming into the room hours ago. If she sat down in the old arm-chair she could not be approached from behind. However, ere sitting down she must get some dry clothes to put on her, and she must find them and effect the change without noise or light. It was now past ten o'clock, and no one in the house must fancy she had not gone to bed, or there might be knocking at her door to know if she required anything. She required nothing of that house but a few hours' shelter.

With great caution she searched where she knew her trunk lay open, found the garments she needed, and replaced her wet clothing with dry. This took time: she could not guess how long, but as it was at length accomplished, and she was taking her first few moments of rest in the easy-chair, she heard the front door shut. Mrs. Brown had gone back to her lodge, and under the roof of Eltham House were only Oscar Leigh, his paralysed mother, and herself.

The banging of the front door made her shudder. The knowledge that Mrs. Brown had gone away for the night increased the isolation of the house. There were now only three people within its walls instead of four, and this circumstance seemed to bring the loathsome Oscar Leigh closer to her. She resolved to sit still. It was eleven

o'clock. It would be bright daylight in a few hours. As soon as the sun rose she should, if the rain had ceased, leave the house and wander about in the bright open daylight until the time to take the first train for London. It would be dawn at three o'clock. From eleven to three was only four hours. Four hours did not seem long to wait.

The chair she sat in was comfortable, spacious, soft. There was little danger of her falling asleep. In her present state of excitement and anxiety sleep would keep off. But even if she should happen to doze, there was small risk. Nothing could be more unlikely than that she should slip out of that capacious chair and attract attention by the noise of her fall to the floor.

She sat herself further back in the chair to avoid the possibility of such an accident. She had remarked during the day, that sound passed easily and fully through the building, owing, no doubt, to the absence of furniture from many of the rooms and the intense stillness surrounding the house.

Until now, she had not noticed the utter silence of the place. All day long she had been too much agitated to perceive it. She was accustomed to the bustle and hum of Great London, which, even in its quietest streets, day and night, never suffers solution of the continuity of sound, artificial sound, sound the product of man. In that deepest hush, that awful calm that falls upon London between one and three in the morning, there may be moments when distinct, individualized sound is wanting, but there is always a faint dull hum, the murmur of the breathing of mute millions of men.

Here, in this room, was not complete silence, for abroad the rain still fell upon the grass and trees with a murmur like the secret speeding of a smooth fast river through the night.

She sat with her back to the partition between her and the dining-room. She had not dared to move the heavy chair for fear of making noise. The chair stood with its back to the partition. It was midway between the outer wall of the house and the partition of the inner hall. On her left, four yards from where she sat, rose a pale blue luminous space, the open window through which she had

entered. On her right, at an equal distance, was the invisible door which she had locked upon retiring hours ago. The large, old-fashioned mahogany four-posted bedstead stood in the middle of the room, between the door and the window. The outline of the bedstead facing the window was dimly discernible in mass. No detail of it could be made out. Something stood there, it was impossible to say what. All the rest of the furniture was lost, swallowed up in gloom, annihilated by the dark.

The room was large and lofty. It was wainscotted as high as a man could reach. Above the wainscot the wall was painted dark green. A heavy cornice ran round the angles of the walls. From door to window was twenty feet. From the partition against which she sat to the wall opposite her was twenty-four feet. The curtains of the bedstead were gathered back at the head and foot posts.

Of all this, beyond the parts of the bedstead fronting the window, Edith could see nothing now. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, her arms close to her side, her head resting on the back of the chair. She closed her eyes, not from drowsiness, but to shut out as much as possible the memory of the place, the thoughts of her situation. She told herself she was once more back in her unpretending little room in Grimsby Street. She tried to make herself believe the beating of the rain on the trees and glass of the conservatory and gravelled carriage sweep in front of the house was the dull murmur of London heard through some new medium. She should hear her grandmother's voice soon.

"Have you done, Oscar?"

"Yes, mother. I have finished for the night."

Edith Grace sat up in her chair and gasped with terror. The words seemed spoken at her ear. The voices were those of Oscar Leigh, the hunchback dwarf, and his mother, Mrs. Leigh, the paralysed old woman! Whence came those voices? What was she about to hear?

For a moment Edith hardly breathed. She had to exercise all her powers of self-control to avoid springing up and screaming. The voices seemed so close to her she expected to hear her own name called out, to feel a hand placed upon her shoulder.

"Yes," the voice of the man said, "I have made the drawings and the calculations. It has taken me time. A great deal of time, mother. But I am right. I have triumphed. I generally *am* right, mother. I generally *do* triumph, mother." He spoke in a tone of elation that rose as he progressed in this speech. His accents changed rapidly, and there was a sound of some one moving. "But, mother, you are tired. It has been a long day for you. You would like to go to your room." His voice had fallen, and was low and guttural, but full of eager solicitude and tenderness.

"Not tired; no, Oscar. I am feeling quite well and lively and strong to-night. For an old woman, who has lost the use of her limbs, I keep very well. When you are with me, Oscar dear, I do not seem so old as when you are away from me, my son." The voice was very low, and tremulous with maternal love.

"Old! Old!" he cried with harsh emphatic gaiety. "You are not old, mother! You are a young woman. You are a girl, compared with the old women I know in London, who would fly into a rage if you hinted that they were past middle life—if you did not, in fact *say* they were young. Why, mother, what is seventy? Nothing! I know dozens of women over eighty, and they keep up their spirits and are blithe and gay, and ready to dance at a wedding, if any man should only ask them. Up to sixty-five a woman ages faster than a man, but once over sixty-five, women grow young again." Towards the end his voice had lost its tone of unpleasant excitement, it became merely jocular and buoyant.

"My spirits are always good when you are here, my son. But when you are away I am very dull. Very dull, dear. It is only natural for me to feel dull, when half of my body is dead already. I cannot be long for the world, Oscar."

"Nonsense," said the other voice gaily. "Your affliction has nothing to do with death. The doctors say it is only a local disturbance. Besides, you know, cracked vessels are last broken. You are compelled to take more care of yourself than other women, and you *do* take care of yourself, I hope. If you do not, I shall be very angry, and keep away altogether from Eltham."

"I take every care of myself, Oscar dear. Every care. I do not want to go away from you. I want to stay with you as long as I can. Oscar dear, I hope it may be granted to me to see your children before I die, dear." The voice was low and tremulous and prayerful. The mournfulness of a mother's heart was in the tone.

"And so you shall, mother," he said briskly, cheerfully. "I mean to astonish you soon. I mean to marry a very handsome wife. I have one in my eye already, mother." He added more gravely, "I have a very handsome wife in my eye. I mean to marry; and I mean to marry her. You know I never make up my mind to do anything that in the end does not come off. But before I marry I must finish my great work. When I have put the last touches to it I shall sell it for a large sum, and retire from business, and live here with you, mother, at my ease."

"And when, my dear son, do you think the great clock will be finished? Tell me all about it. It is the only thing in the world I am jealous of. Tell me how it gets on. Have you added any new wonders to it? When will you be done with it?"

The fright had by this time died out of Edith's heart. She now understood who the owners of the voices were, why the speakers seemed so near. Oscar Leigh was talking to his mother in the dining-room. They both believed she was in deep sleep and could not hear, or they forgot the thinness of the substance separating them. Between the dining-room and where she sat was only the slight panel of a folding door. This room, now a sleeping apartment, had once been the breakfast-parlour. She had not in the day-time noticed that the two rooms were divided only by folding doors. If she had the alternative, she would have got up and left the room. But she had no alternative. She would much rather not hear the words, the voices of these two people. If she coughed, or made a noise, she would but attract attention to herself, bring some one, perhaps, knocking at her door. Nothing could be more undesirable than a visitor, or inquiries at her door. If she coughed, to show the speakers that she was awake, Mrs. Leigh, or he, might knock and speak to her. Mrs. Leigh might, on some plea, ask to see her, ask to be

allowed to roll her invalid chair into the room, and then she would find the tenant of it dressed for out of doors, the bed untossed, the floor littered with the scattered contents of her trunk, the wet bedraggled clothes and boots she had taken off. There was nothing for her to do but to remain perfectly still. She was not listening, in the mean or hateful sense of the word. She did not want to overhear, but she could not help hearing. She could not cover her ears, for that would shut out all sound, and the use of hearing was essential to her own safety, her own protection, situated as she found herself. Leigh had given her to understand he was a mechanician. He was telling his mother of his work. He was about to give her particulars of a clock upon which he was engaged. Let them talk on about this clock. It was nothing to her. She was interested intensely in the passage of time, but in no clock. She did not want to hear of an hour-measurer, but of the hour maker. She cared nothing for man's divisions of time: she prayed with all her heart for a sight of God's time-marker, the sun.

CHAPTER III.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

"SOON, soon, mother. I shall be finished soon. I cannot tell exactly when, but not very far off. I see the end of my labours, the reward of all my study, the fruit of all my life," said the voice of the hunchbacked dwarf.

There was a pause in the speech. "Hah," breathed Leigh, in loud inspiration. Then there was a snuffing sound, and another loud inspiration. "Hah! that is refreshing—most refreshing. Will you have some, mother? Do. You won't? Very well. What was I saying?"

The strong, subtle vapour of eau-de-cologne penetrated through the slits and joints of the folding-doors, and floated past Edith towards the open windows.

"About the clock," said Mrs. Leigh. "You were going

to tell me what new wonders you have added to it, and when the crowning wonder of all was to be fixed."

"What?" cried the voice of the dwarf, loudly, harshly, angrily. "What do you know of the crowning wonder? Tell me, woman, at once!" His tone was violent, imperious, threatening.

"Oscar! Oscar! What is the matter? What do you mean by calling me 'woman'? Oscar, my son, are you ill? What is the matter? Why do you look at me in that way? You are crushing my hand. What is the matter, Oscar, my own boy?" The woman's accents were full of alarm.

"Agh! Agh! Pardon me. Agh! Pardon me, my dear mother. Agh!" he coughed violently, hoarsely. "The spirit of the eau-de-cologne must have gone down my throat and caught my breath. I am quite right now. Pray excuse me, mother. What was I saying?"

"Something about the clock, dear. But, Oscar, do not mind telling me about it now. You seem not well. Perhaps you had better rest yourself. You can explain about the clock to-morrow."

"Oh, ay, the clock. Of course. I am quite well, mother. You need not be uneasy about me. What was I going to tell you about the clock?"

"You were going to tell me—I do not know really what. I asked you when it would be completed. That is my chief anxiety, for then you will be always here—always here, near me, my dear son."

"Certainly; when I sell my unrivalled clock, I'll give up living in London and come down here to you, mother, and become a private gentleman."

"But why can't you come down and stop here always, my Oscar? Surely your clock could be brought to Millway, and back to London again when 'tis finished?" The voice of the woman was caressing, pleading. "I have not very long to live, Oscar. Might not I have you near me that little time?" The tone was tremulous and pathetic.

"Dear, dear mother," he said softly, tenderly. "I cannot—I cannot move the clock. You forget how large it is. I have told you over and over again it would half fill this room. Besides, I have other business in London I cannot

leave just now. I will come as soon as ever I can. You may take my word for that. Let us say no more on that subject at present. I was going to explain to you about my marvellous clock. Let me see. What have I already told you?"

"Oh, it was too wonderful to remember. Tell me over again."

"Very well. To begin with, it will, of course, measure time first of all. That is the principal and easiest thing to contrive. It will show the year, the month, the day of the month, the day of the week, the hour of the day, the minute of the hour, the second of the minute, the tenth of the second. All these will be shown on one dial."

"That much alone puzzles and astonishes me. It will be the most useful clock in the world."

"So far that is all easy, and would not make it even a very remarkable clock, mother. It will take account of leap year, and be constructed to run till the year ten thousand of the Christian era."

"When once wound up?"

"Oh no, you simple mother. It will have to be wound up every week."

"But will not the machinery wear out?"

"Yes, the metal and the stones will wear out and rust out before eight thousand years. But the principle will have eight thousand years of vitality in it. Steel and brass and rubies yield to friction and time, but a principle lives for ever if it is a true principle——"

"And a good principle," interrupted the voice of the old woman, piously.

"Good or bad, if it is true it will last," said the voice of the hunchback, harshly. Then he went on in more gentle and even tones. "On another face it will tell the time of high water in fifty great maritime cities. There will be four thousand Figures of Time, figures of all the great men of the past, each bearing a symbol of his greatest work, or thought, or achievement, and each appearing on the anniversary of his death, thus there will be from eight to twenty figures visible each day, and that day will be the anniversary of the one on which each of the men died years ago."

"Four thousand figures! Why, it will cost a fortune!"

"Four thousand historic figures each presented on the anniversary of death! I am at work on the figures of those who died on the 22nd of August just now. They are very interesting to me, and one of them is the most interesting of all, the most interesting of all the four thousand figures."

"And who died on the 22nd of August, Oscar? Whose is the figure that interests you most of all, my son?"

"Richard Plantagenet of Gloucester," fiercely.

"Eh?" in a tone of intense pain.

"Richard Plantagenet of Gloucester, commonly called Richard the Third of England, and nicknamed the Hunchbacked Tyrant," maliciously.

"Oscar!" in a tone of protest and misery.

"Yes. Hump and all, I am now making the figure of the most famous hunchback in history. I take a delight in modelling the figure of my Hunchback Tyrant. In body and soul I can sympathise with—him." He spoke furiously, and there was a sound in the room as if he rose.

"Oh, you break my heart, my boy, my boy, my son! Don't, for God's sake, don't. You cut me to the soul! You frighten me when you look in that way." She spoke in terror and anguish.

There were hasty, halting, footsteps pacing up and down the dining-room. The folding-doors behind Edith's head trembled, the windows of the dining-room rattled. The girl wondered he did not think of her. He knew her room lay beyond the dining-room, and he must be aware nothing divided her room from the front one but the thin panels of the folding-doors. It was plain to her now he did not care whether she heard or not.

"Break your heart, mother!" he went on in a tone of excitement but less acerbity. "Why should what I say break your heart? What hurt can words do? Look at me! Me! If I were to say my heart was broken, no one would wonder. I am not reproaching you. Heaven knows, if I turned upon you, I should have no friend left in all the world. Not one soul who would care for me—care whether I lived or died, whether I prospered or was hanged by the common hangman on a gibbet!"

"Oh, Oscar, what is it? What has done it? What has soured you so? You never talked in this way until now."

What has changed you?" The voice of the woman was broken. She was weeping through her words.

"A girl's face. A girl's face has changed me. I, who had a heart of adamant, a heart of the core of adamant befitting the crooked carcase in which it is penned and warped and blackened by villainous obstructions. But there! I have been vapouring, mother. Let my words pass. I am a fool and worse to break out in such a way before you, my good, gentle mother." His voice became less excited, his steps more slow and light. "It is passed. I am myself again. I know your advice is good. I mean to follow it. I will marry a wife. I will marry a pretty, shapely wife. You shall have grand children at your knee, mother, before long, before you go. Well-favoured and gay and flawless, and straight-backed, and right-limbed little children who will overtop me, exceed me in height before they begin their teens, but will never, never, never, mother, grow to near the degree of love I have for you." His voice and steps ceased, as though he paused at her side.

"Do not kneel," she whispered huskily. "Do not kneel, my son. I was frightened a moment ago, and now I feel suffocated with joy. There! That is right. Sit in your own chair again."

For a while Edith heard sobs—the sobs of a man.

The woman had ceased to weep.

When the sobbing stopped, the woman said: "Who is she? Do I know her? Do I know even her name?"

"All that is my secret, mother. I will not say any more of her but that I am accustomed to succeed, and I will succeed here. I will keep the secret of her name in my heart to goad me on. I am accustomed to succeed. Rest assured I will succeed in this. We will say no more of it. Let it be a forbidden subject between us until I speak of it again; until, perhaps, I bring her to you."

"As you will, Oscar. Keep your secret. I can trust and wait."

"It is best. I feel better already. That storm has cleared the air. I was excited. I have reason to be excited to-day. At this moment—it is now just twelve o'clock—at this moment I am either succeeding or failing in one of my most important aims."

"Just now, Oscar. Do you mean here?"

"No, not here. In London. You do not believe in magic, mother?"

"Surely not. What do you mean? You do not believe in anything so foolish?"

"Or in clairvoyance or spectres, mother?"

"No, my child. Nor you, I hope. That is, I do not believe in all the tales I hear from simple folk."

"And yet not everything—not half everything—is understood even now."

"Will you not tell me of this either?"

"Not to-night, mother. Not to-night. Another time, perhaps, I may. You know I had a week ago no intention of coming here to-day. I did not come to welcome Miss Grace. I had another reason for coming. I am trying an experiment to-night. At this moment I am putting the result of many anxious hours to the touch. If my experiment turns out well I shall come into a strange power. But there, I will say no more about it, for I must not explain, and it is not fair to tell you, all at once, that I have two secrets from you. And now, mother, it is very late for you. We must go to bed. That patent couch still enables you to do without aid in dressing?"

"Yes. I am still able to do without help. I think some of the springs want oiling. You will look at them to-morrow?"

"Yes. But it must be early. I am going back to town at noon."

"So soon? I did not think you would leave till later, Oscar. I don't want to pry into your secrets, but you spoke of gaining some strange powers. Do you think it wise to play with—with—with—?"

"With what, mother?"

"With strange powers."

"That depends on what the strange powers are."

"But tell me there is no danger."

"To me? No, I think not."

"Oscar, I am uneasy."

"We have sat and talked too long. You are worn out. I will wheel you to your room. I am sleepy myself."

Edith Grace heard the sound of Mrs. Leigh's invalid chair

moving towards the dining room door, then the door open and the chair pass down the hall and into Mrs. Leigh's bedroom. Words passed between the mother and son, but she did not catch their import. She heard the door of Mrs. Leigh's room opposite her own close and then the dragging, lame footsteps of the hunchback on the tiles of the back hall.

The girl listened intently. She did not move. She was sitting bolt upright in her chair with her face turned towards the door of the room.

Leigh's irregular, shuffling footsteps became more distinct. He was crossing the hall from his mother's room to the stairs, which began at the left-hand side of the back hall, close to the door of the room where Edith sat.

"He is going upstairs to his own room. When he is gone the house will be still and I shall be at ease. Daylight will soon come and then I can slip away again and wait till the first train for London—for home! He must be mad. Even if he had not pressed his hateful attentions on me I would not stay in this house for all the world," thought Edith Grace.

The slow, shuffling footsteps did not ascend the stairs. They paused. They paused, she could not tell exactly where. All her faculties were concentrated in hearing, and she heard nothing, absolutely nothing, but the rain. Could it be he had reached the stairs and was ascending inaudibly? Could it be he had already ascended? She thought it was but a moment ago since he closed his mother's door. He might have gone up unheard. It might be longer since the door shut than she thought. She could not judge time exactly in the dark, and when she was so powerfully excited. Should she get up out of that chair, open the door as quietly as possible, and peer into the hall? What good would that do? If he were there he would see her; if he were not there all was well. Besides, it would be quite impossible to unlock the door and open it without making a noise, without the snap of the lock, the grating of the latch, the creaking of the hinge. It was better to remain quiet.

Suddenly she heard a sound that made her heart stand still, her breath cease to come. She grew rigid with terror.

She heard a something soft sliding over the outside of

that door. A hand! It touched and rattled the handle. The handle turned, and with a low, dull sound the door opened! She could not see the door. The light which had illumed the fan sash in the porch had evidently been extinguished, for there was no gleam through the open door. That part of the room was so intensely dark, even the masses in it were invisible. But she knew by the dull, puffing sound the door had been opened, and by the surge of the heavy, damp, warm air.

She could not move or cry out if she would. She was completely paralysed; frozen. She was aware of possessing only two senses, hearing and seeing. She was not conscious of her own identity beyond what was presented to her sensations through her ears or her eyes. She did not even ask herself how he had come there, how he had opened from the hall the door she had left locked upon the inside.

He entered the room with slow, deliberate, limping steps. She could hear the footfall of his left foot and the slight, brushing touch of his right foot as he drew it after the left.

On slowly he came until he touched the bed. She could dimly make out the white of his face and shirt-front against the gleam from the window as he advanced. It was plain he could not see as well as she, for he walked up against the bed. His eyes had not become accustomed to the darkness.

He turned to his left, towards where she sat, and came on, feeling his way, by the bed. She heard him feeling his way. As soon as he reached the foot-post he turned right, round where she sat in the deepest gloom of the room and then walked to the window.

When he reached the window he stood full in front of it and muttered: "Rain, rain still." He thrust his arms out of the window and drawing them back in a moment, rubbed his face with his hands. "That is refreshing," he muttered. "Hah! They say rain-water is the best lotion for preserving the beauty of the skin. Hah! They do. They say Ninon de L'Enclos kept her beauty up to past seventy by rain-water. Hah! They do. They say she did. Hah! I wonder how long would it preserve *my* beauty. Ha-ha-ha! More than a century, I suppose. I wonder would rain-water preserve the beauty of my hump. I believe my hump is

one of the most beautiful ever man wore. But it doesn't seem to count for much among a man's attractions. People don't appear to care much for humps, whether they are really beauties of this kind or not. Hah! They don't. People don't. Hah! They are not educated up to humps. Hah!"

At each exclamation "Hah!" he made a powerful expiration of breath. Before each exclamation he rubbed his forehead with one hand drawn in wet from the rain falling outside the window.

"*She*, for instance," he went on, "doesn't care much for humps. She prefers straight-backed men with straight strong legs. And yet straight-backed men with straight strong legs are common enough in all conscience. Most of the beggars even are straight-backed and strong-legged. I am not. Hah! How cool and refreshing this rain-water is. I am a novelty and yet people don't care for such a novelty as I am. No; they prefer men cut to pattern. *She* would rather have a straight-backed beggar than me, and yet I am more interesting, more uncommon. I am more remarkable to look at, and then I have genius. Yes; I have a form of body far out of the common, and a form of mind far out of the common, too. I have a hump and genius. Hah! But no one cares for a hump or genius. *She* doesn't, for instance. Hah! But I mean that she shall like me. I mean to make love to her. I mean to woo her, and to win her. Hah! She doesn't know me now as well as she will know me later. I have never been in love before. I can't say I like the feeling. I used to be very valiant and self-sufficing, and at my ease in my mind. Hah! I looked on women as the mere dross of humanity—not worthy to associate with cripples. Hah! Of course; I except my mother, who is the best and dearest soul God ever sent to earth. But now I am in love, and this girl, this young girl, seems precious to me. Hah! Certainly I shall win her. I have not yet learned to fail, and I don't mean to learn how to fail now. Hah! How cool and refreshing the rain is. What is it I came into this room for? Stay. Let me think. Oh, yes! my mother asked me to put the window down before I went upstairs. Hah! Yes. I will. There!"

He let the window down without any regard to the noise. It smote harshly upon the sill. Edith did not move, did not make a sound. She was glad at the moment, though she did not realize that she was glad, because he had let down the window. The diminished light would reduce the chance of his seeing her even now that his eyes had grown used to the darkness. She did not realize that she was glad until afterwards. All her consciousness was still concentrated on hearing and seeing.

Leigh turned away from the window, and began slowly retracing his steps to the door, muttering as he went along the side of the bed opposite the window :

"Yes, she has run away. Run away from this house a few hours after entering it. Run away, frightened, terrified by my ugliness."

He had reached the foot of the bed by this time, and, crossing between where she sat, turned in the darkness at the foot-board. Only his head rose above the high foot-board. His hand moved in dim relief against the background of the white head part of the bed discernible over the foot-board.

As he spoke these words her first thought beyond a desire to hear and see entered her mind. It gave her instant and enormous relief, although as before she was not at the moment attentive to the relief. The feeling, however, took in her mind the form of words. "He knows I left the house. He does not know I have come back."

He paused directly in front of her, and seemed to rest against the foot-board. He muttered in a voice more deep and faint than the one in which he had hitherto spoken :

"She ran away, this Edith Grace, she ran away from my ugliness. Ha-ha-ha! We shall see, Edith Grace. We shall see. I did not tell my mother the name of the girl I mean to marry. She shall know it soon enough, and not all the wiles or force of man shall keep me from my purpose, keep Edith Grace from me!"

He thrust his arms out to their full length in front of him and drew them back swiftly towards him. The air from the motion of his long thin hands touched her cheek.

She drew her head back a hand's breadth. Otherwise she did not stir. She sat motionless. She had no power

over the actions of her body. She could not cry out or move further.

Oscar Leigh turned, crept slowly along the foot and right side of the bed, fumbled for the door handle, and, having found it, went out of the room, closing and latching the door quietly after him.

Then she heard him toilfully, ponderously, going up stairs. Presently a door above was closed and complete silence fell upon the house.

The spell lifted from the girl, and covering her face with her hands she sank back in the chair with a tremulous, heavy sigh of relief.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WING.

EDITH lay in the large easy-chair for a long time without stirring. She did not even think. It was enough that she had been delivered from the danger of discovery, and that she was free to take wing and fly away at the streak of earliest dawn.

She did not know how long she sat with her face covered with her hands. She had resolved not to move for a long time, and for a long time she remained motionless. There was no fear of her sleeping. Although her mind was not actively employed about anything it was sharply awake. The first thing to challenge her attention was a sound. No boding or terrible sound, but the faint, weak shrill chirp of a bird. She scarcely realized what it was at first, for she was unfamiliar with the country and unused to the early notes of field and wood.

She took her hands from before her face and looked at the window. The light was still very grey and blue. But it was light, and, moreover, light that would grow stronger every minute, every second. When the day is breaking for joy or deliverance, the light fills the veins with an ethereal intoxication. Thoughts which during darkness can be met only with pallid terror can, when the shadow of night has passed away, be faced with vital courage and endurance.

She rose with care, but there was firmness and decision in her movements. She was fully dressed for walking. The rain had stopped and the sky above the trees spread clear and stainless, a vast plain of open blue.

Oscar Leigh had lowered the window. She caught the sash and raised it very gently but with no trepidation. If the door had that moment opened, she would have simply sprung through the window, without a word. The want of sleep dulls the apprehensions of fear as well as the other faculties of the mind. It sobers the judgment and reduces the susceptibility to extravagance of emotion.

When she had got the sash up to its full height, she stepped resolutely out on the gravelled carriage-sweep. She felt almost at ease. She paused a moment, looked back into the room, and under the shadow of her hand saw that the note she had placed on the table was gone. She turned away from the window and began walking along the gravelled drive towards the gate.

In the face of freedom and the growing light of day the events of last night were beginning to lose all aspect of mystery or terror and to assume a commonplace aspect. The wild talk of the hunchback with his mother grew to have little or no significance worthy of attention, and the soliloquy at the window was, upon review, becoming absurd. Indisputably she was right in leaving that house. It would be entirely unpleasant to live in a house where a man whom she did not like, forced attentions on her. She would go back to London and tell her story at home, and get another place. That was all. No one but her grandmother and herself need know of this first unpleasant experience of trying to earn her bread.

Here was the gate. Locked! Of course. Mrs. Brown had told her the gate was locked by her every night when she came from the house at eleven o'clock. Edith had forgotten this. She had not bargained for finding her way barred a short distance from the house. A couple of hours ago this would have seemed an insuperable obstacle. Now she was free, and quite destitute of terror, of fear, of even grave uneasiness. She felt she could be almost angry, indignant, with this gate and those who had shut and fastened it against her egress.

She turned her face from the gate and looked back at Eltham House. All there appeared quiet and asleep. She looked at the little lodge on her right. Here all seemed quiet and asleep too. The door was shut, the curtains of the windows, one on each side of the door, were close drawn. She could hear no sound but the chatter of the small birds in the hedges, the cawing of distant rooks, and afar off the vexatious crowing of a cock.

The solitude of morning in the country around her was widely different from the solitude of the night just gone by. The solitude of midnight seemed designed for the return of banished spirits; the solitude of the dawn a desert from which man had fled for ever. A sense of desolation came upon her. She wanted to be free, to be at the other side of that gate, but when she found herself on the open road what should she do? For hours to come the people of Millway would not be stirring. She was fleeing from that house into a desolate and uninhabited plain, for though there might be people within call, they were not within sight. Anyway, she could not stay here at the gate. She was now the most conspicuous object on which the upper windows of the house looked, and if he were to come to a front window he could not fail to see her. If anyone happened to pass along that road she would be a conspicuous and most remarkable figure inside that gate at this hour.

She walked to the door of the lodge and softly placed her hand on the latch. It yielded to her touch. She pressed against the door; it moved inward. Disclosed to view was a tiny square hall, in which were two doors. Close to the door which she had opened a large iron holdfast projected from the wall, and upon the holdfast hung a large, clumsy key. The key of the gate? Perhaps so.

In a moment she had taken the key off the hook, gone back to the gate, and inserted the key in the lock. In a minute she was outside the gate on the open road. She closed the gate noiselessly behind her, and hastened away, she knew not whither.

Before she had gone a hundred yards she discovered she had turned to the right instead of to the left. She intended walking towards the town, and it lay on her left as she came through the gateway. She hastened back and found

the gate quickly. She kept on at this pace until she was about as far on this side of the gate as she had been on the other. Then she slackened her speed, moving demurely along the road.

After all, from what was she fleeing? Why was she hastening away? What prevented her staying in the house until ten o'clock, and then going to the railway station, in the ordinary way?

She could not remain in the house to be found there when it was believed she had left it for good. But why had she rushed out of it the previous night in a panic? Surely there had been nothing to alarm her. No doubt Mr. Leigh had tried to kiss her upon her arrival, and she could not stay after that affront. It was intolerable that any man should attempt to kiss *her*. He had tried to excuse himself by saying he had only offered her a patriarchal welcome. The idea of a man who was only thirty-five years claiming the privileges of age was absurd. But, upon reflection, he might not have meant patriarchal to imply length of life, but method of life. He might have intended to convey that he, as male head of the house, assumed the privileges which obtained in patriarchal times, in remote times, when the head of the house posed as the father of all dwelling within its gates. But even if that were so, there was an affront in any such presumption, and she could not consent to remain under that roof longer than necessary. His gallantries of bows, and civil speech, and offers of service, following his atrocious attempt, were enough to warrant her in leaving if there had been no other provocation.

But there had been no occasion for mysterious or surreptitious flight. Plainly no desire existed of detaining her against her will. She had been permitted to retire to her room on pleading fatigue, the window was then fully open, the gate had not been fastened, and even when the gate was locked for the night the key was left lying accessible to anyone within the grounds. True, he believed her to be now in London. He did not know she had lost the train. Seemingly, he had taken not the least trouble to detain her in the house or to ascertain what her movements were when she quitted it.

Viewed by the sober light of day it appeared she had

been making a silly romance out of some half-jocular attentions paid to her by a vulgar man, almost old enough to be her father! His soliloquy at the window about making her his wife had been only a little more absurd than his share in the dialogue between him and his mother. Presently, in a few days, the whole affair would appear nothing more than an unpleasant dream. In all likelihood she should never see Mrs. Leigh or her son again. The chances were a million to one against her encountering either during the remainder of her life. She would dismiss the whole affair from her mind and think of other matters.

Not a soul to be seen or heard yet. What a ridiculous thing it was to say that people of the country were earlier risers than people of the town! Fancy walking a mile at any time in the morning through London without meeting a soul!

About half-a-mile from Millway a seat had been placed by the side of the road. It was formed of three square bars of wood supported upon three square pillars of stone. Edith sat down and rested. She did not move until she heard the sound of approaching wheels and horses. She rose and walked briskly in the direction from which she heard the sounds. She walked quickly, with her head down, as though knowing well whither she was going, and being in haste. Two sleepy men in a cart looked with drowsy eyes at her as they passed, but said nothing. These were the first people she had met since she left Eltham House. They did not speak to her, ask her any questions, seem to take the slightest interest in her. This was reassuring. When the cart was out of sight, she returned to the seat and rested again. She would not go back towards the house lest she might be seen by Mr. Leigh or Mrs. Brown; she would not go among the sleeping houses lest she might attract attention, invite inquiries. No one else came near for half-an-hour. Then a scattered group of labourers, tramping doggedly onward from the town, disturbed her solitude. She got up and passed these quickly, as before. One of the men said "Good morning," civilly. Before they disappeared from view a second cart sounded on the road. The country was at length awake. It would not be desirable for her to sit on that bench in the view of people

at that early hour. She resolved to keep moving now until the railway station opened.

After leaving that bench finally, she walked into the town as if on business of urgency, but of no alarm. It would not do to seem careless of her route or speed ; it would not do to seem eagerly in haste ; it would not do to seem as though she was strange to the place. She had no fear but that shy fear of attracting attention instinctively developed in those who flee, no matter from what they flee.

She wandered through many streets and roads that day, but took no note of them. She adopted a plan to avoid losing her bearings. There were six roads leading out of Millway. She took them one after the other from her left hand, went forward upon each a thousand steps, counting each step in her mind, and then came back to the point from which she had started, also counting each step as she returned. This prevented her wandering far, or losing her way. Counting the steps kept her mind fully occupied, and prevented her noticing the fatigue, or becoming unhappily conscious of her unusual position.

Upon comparing the numbers of outward and backward steps, she found that the stretch of road which measured a thousand from town, measured never more than nine hundred and fifty back. As soon as she turned towards Millway, although she knew the station would not be open when she arrived there, she unconsciously increased the length of each pace.

Only once in her monotonous and fatiguing task did anything unpleasant come in her path, and then the unpleasant object was a plain white-washed wall. Yet it gave her a sick thrill of terror. Fortunately it was in her last radiation from Millway.

She was quite unfamiliar with the town. She had never seen it until the day before, and then only as the fly drove from the station to Eltham House. This morning she had determined her course from left to right, taking the wide and open streets, down which she could see far. She passed by several ways which did not look main arteries of traffic. When it was half an hour of train time, she left behind two narrow and unpromising-looking streets, and coming upon the broadest and most open one she had yet encountered,

committed herself to it without hesitation, merely making the reflection, "This is my last turn. It will be time to go to the station when I reach this corner again."

After that she took no heed of the street in which she was, but kept on. Fatigue, and the knowledge that her walk was approaching an end, made her duller and more indifferent than before. She did not look around her. She counted her steps in a purely mechanical manner. They, as it were, went on counting themselves without effort on her part. It is doubtful if she then could have stopped the enumeration. Her plan up to this had been to count up to a hundred and then begin again, closing up a finger for each five score told.

The road was not straight. She did not notice that at the end of the first hundred the street had narrowed, and the flagging ceased. Before the end of the second hundred was chronicled, the pathway disappeared, the houses grew mean and dilapidated. Before she counted two hundred and fifty, she was traversing an alley, filthy under foot, with battered, squalid houses and hovels on either side. This was the most foul and disreputable part of Millway. It was inhabited by the unfortunate, the dissolute, and the disreputable. No one of good repute and appearance had been down there for years and years.

She saw nothing of what lay around her, did not notice the filthy, ratty ground on which she trod; did not observe the windless, noisome air through which she moved.

All at once she drew up with a quick start, and uttered a suppressed cry of alarm. She was in front of a blank white-washed wall. She glanced around in terror, looking for an avenue of escape. There was none except the way by which she had come. She found herself at the end of a frowsy, villainous-looking *cul-de-sac*.

She shuddered and stood still, not knowing for the moment what to do. There was no going forward; to go back was to confess she had lost her way. Even the white radiance of the morning could not make that close, foetid, ruinous street look innocent. It had vice and crime written too deeply on its evil face. Fortunately, no one was stirring in the street, but each house and hovel had windows, and windows of fearful aspect, and behind these windows

she imagined hideous winking eyes, and fleering faces. What if some one, some hulking, slouching figure, should shamble out of one of those sinister doorways, and plant itself in the middle of the lane, blocking up her path, and forbidding her flight!

She caught her breath and stooped her head, and ran swiftly, fiercely, madly, as though pursued by a pack of ravenous wolves. She fancied she heard the clatter of swift, relentless feet, the clamour of ruthless voices behind her ears. She imagined she felt the touch of claw-like hands upon her shoulder. She imagined she could see out of the corners of her eyes the foul fingers of her pursuers on her shoulder, on her sleeve! She thought she heard, felt, their breathings at her ears! She ran as for life from awful death.

All at once the figure of a man barred her way, blocked her path. With a cry of despair she stood still. The man seemed to be awaiting her approach. He moved a step towards her and said: "Beg pardon, miss. You need not run. There's plenty of time. The train does not start till six-fifteen, and it's only a quarter to six."

This was the friendly railway-porter of the night before. He had just stepped out of his lodging. She had failed to notice that she had left the reeking slum behind her, and was once more in the main street of the town.

She made a powerful effort and collected herself.

"Plenty of time, miss," said the man respectfully, "if you are going up to London by the six-fifteen." He waved his hand in the direction of the station.

"Thank you. I am much obliged to you. I—I did not wish to be late." Her breath was so short from running she spoke irregularly and with difficulty.

"I am going to open the station, miss. Would you like to sit in the waiting room?"

"Thank you. I would."

He drew aside and she passed him. He followed at a deferential distance.

In five minutes they stood on the platform. He opened the door of the waiting room. Then he paused and thought a moment. He turned to her and said, pointing to a line of carriages drawn up at the platform: "That's the train for

London. You haven't to change until you get there. Are you going to Victoria or Ludgate?"

"Victoria."

"That," pointing, "part of the train is for Victoria—the forward part, miss." He looked at her again, and noticed that her boots showed signs of a long walk. "Perhaps you would like to go straight into a carriage?"

"I should prefer that."

"I can see to your luggage and get your ticket for you, miss, so that you need not stir once you get in."

"I have no luggage here. It will be sent after me. Not first-class, thank you. I shall travel third, if you please." She coloured a little more deeply. Her usually pale face was faintly flushed from her late haste and excitement. "Here is the money for the ticket. You have been very kind to me—I am extremely sorry I—I—I can't make you a little present—but——"

"Don't mention it, miss. It's my duty, miss, to do what I can to oblige passengers. Take the far corner with your back to the engine. I'll lock you in. We haven't many passengers by this train, and I may be able to keep the carriage altogether for you, at starting, anyway. The ticket office won't be open for a few minutes. With your back to the engine, miss. I'll bring you the ticket in time. You are locked in now, miss, and you need not stir until you get to Victoria."

She thanked him again and he left her. Now the full effect of her long walk, the reaction from the excitement of the night and want of sleep, fell upon her with leaden weight of drowsiness. She was safe, at rest now, on her way home. This was a blessed change from the strain of mind in the darkness, and the weary, weary walking and counting in the light. She went on counting still, exactly at the rate of her paces on the road.

Her head rested in the corner of the narrow compartment. Her brain still went stolidly on counting whether she would or not. She closed her eyes. A delicious numbness began to steal over her. She had a faint consciousness that a few people were out on the platform. She heard as from afar off the sound of voices and feet.

"Your ticket, miss."

Something was placed in her hand, she started and caught it in her gloved fingers, closely.

"I'll lock the door again, miss. You are all right now till you get to Victoria."

"Thank you, very much."

This dialogue sounded faintly in her ears, she had no clear perception that she had taken part in it. In another minute she was fast asleep with her head resting in the corner of the carriage and a soft smile upon her lips.

After her eyelids closed and she became unconscious in sleep, the following dialogue took place on the platform, outside the window of her carriage:

"You are not to go in there, sir, that compartment is engaged."

"Third class compartment engaged! Rubbish! Open the door, I say, at once!"

"No, sir, I cannot. I do not mean that the compartment is engaged by paying for it."

"Open it this instant."

"The lady has been very ill of some catching complaint and must travel alone. See, she is asleep."

"No matter. I too am very ill of a catching complaint. Open the door. You won't! Oh, it doesn't make any difference, I'll open it myself. I always carry a key. Porter, you have lost a shilling. But there, I won't be vindictive, here's a shilling for being good to the lady. She is a friend of mine. You are doing well this morning, porter. She paid you first for reserving the compartment, then I pay you instead of reporting you for being impertinent and corrupt."

"She gave me nothing. The lady had only her bare fare to Victoria, and if you know her she will tell you that I got her ticket and she had no money left."

"You're new to this place. I never saw you here before. Go away. Only you are so young a fool I'd get you into trouble."

All this was said in low voices so as to be inaudible to the girl, even if she had been awake, but she was not awake, she was in profound sleep.

The new passenger was seated in the compartment, and, as the porter turned away, he closed and locked the door softly. In less than a minute the train steamed out of the

station. The girl slept on with a smile of relief and deliverance around her fresh young mouth.

The second traveller sat facing the engine on the side opposite Edith, and directly in front of her, by the open window. He was a short deformed man and carried a heavy crooked walking-stick. For a few minutes after the train began to move he remained without moving. The girl slept heavily, swaying slightly from side to side with the motion of the train, her two gloved hands lay placidly on her lap. Between the thumb and fore-finger of her right hand was the ticket bought for her by the friendly porter, and representing all the money she had had beyond a few halfpence.

When the train had been five minutes on its way and had gained its full speed, the man leaned forward towards the sleeping girl, and with infinite gentleness and care drew the ticket out of her hand, keeping his eyes on her eyelids the whole time. Without taking his eyes off her face, he raised his right hand, thrust it, holding the ticket between his thumb and finger, out of the carriage window, and dropped the ticket into the rushing air. Then he sat back in his corner opposite Edith, and sighed and smiled.

CHAPTER V.

MR. LEIGH'S DEPUTY.

It was early in the afternoon the same day, the last Thursday of June. The rain of the night before had been general in the South of England. It had fallen heavily in London, and washed and freshened the dusty, parched streets. Now all London capable of being made fresh and blithe by weather was blazing gallantly in the unclouded radiance of summer. Even Chetwynd Street, a third rate thoroughfare of the less delectable and low-lying part of Westminster, looked gay in comparison with its usual squalor, for it had been scoured clean and sweetened by the waters of Heaven. The wind and the rain, and the sun of Heaven, were all the friends Chetwynd Street seemed to have. Man had

built it. It was man's own, and man seemed to despise his handiwork, and neglect his duty towards what he had made.

Few civilians with good clothes and sound boots visited Chetwynd Street. Policemen go everywhere, and were to be seen in this street now and then, and soldiers often strayed into it, for they are common in all the region. But although the publicans and pawnbrokers of the thoroughfare were well-to-do people, they did not put their wealth upon their backs. It would have been considered ostentatious for ordinary mortals to wear broadcloth within the precincts of the street. The sumptuary laws of the place forbade broadcloth for every-day wear to all except clergymen, doctors, and undertakers. On Sundays, or festivals, such as marriages and funerals, broadcloth might be worn by the prosperous tradespeople without exciting anger or reproach.

The two most prosperous shopkeepers in the place were Mr. Williams, landlord of the Hanover public house, at the corner of Welbeck Place, leading to Welbeck Mews, and Mr. Forbes, baker, at the opposite corner of Welbeck Place. Mr. Williams's house was all glitter and brightness on the ground floor. He had two large plate-glass windows, divided only by a green and gilt iron pillar, looking into Chetwynd Street, and two large plate-glass windows, divided only by a green and gilt iron pillar, looking into Welbeck Place. The door of Mr. Williams's house faced Chetwynd Street. Mr. Forbes was not so lavish of glass or gas-light as his neighbour of the Hanover. His only window on the shop-floor, looking into Chetwynd Street, was composed of panes of crown glass of moderate size. In Welbeck Place, on the ground floor, he had a blank wall, and farther up the Place a modest door. In Chetwynd Street, beyond the shop door, was another door belonging to him; the door to the staircase and dwelling part of the house above the shop. The door in Welbeck Place, led also to the base of the staircase, and to the bakehouse at the rear. The side door was not used for business purposes of the bakery. The back of the bakehouse at the rear stood in Welbeck Mews, and here was a door through which Mr. Forbes's flour and coal came in and loaves went out. Mr. Forbes had several bakeries in the neighbourhood. He did not

reside in the upper part of his house in Chetwynd Street. He used the first floor as a warehouse. He stored all kinds of odds and ends here, including empty sacks, and sometimes flour. One of the rooms he had used as an office, but gave it up, and now kept it locked, idle. It was not easy to let the upper parts of houses to respectable people in this street. It would not suit his business to let the house in tenements to any lodgers who might offer.

For the second floor he had a most respectable tenant, who paid his rent with punctuality, and gave no trouble at all. There were three rooms on the second or top floor. A sitting-room, a bed-room, and a work-shop. The sitting-room was farthest from Welbeck Place, being over the hall and part of the shop. The bed-room was over the middle section of the shop. The work-room was at the eastern end of the house. The bed-room looked into Chetwynd Street. The sitting-room looked into the same street. The work-shop looked into Welbeck Place. The bed-room and sitting-room were immediately over that part of the house used by Mr. Forbes as a store or lumber room. The work-shop on the top floor was directly over what once served as an office for the baker, and was now locked up.

The man and his wife in charge of the business slept in the bakehouse at the back which opened into the mews. The only person sleeping in the house proper was the tenant of the second floor. At the top of the staircase, on the second floor, there was a stout door, which could be locked on either side, so that the tenant had a flat all to himself, and was as independent as if he owned a whole house. In the matter of doors, he was rather better off than his neighbours, who had whole houses; for he had, first of all, the door of his own flat at the top of the stairs, and was allowed a key for the outer door into Chetwynd Street, and one for the door into Welbeck Place. For the door at the back, that one from the bakehouse into the mews, he had not been given a key by the landlord, nor did he ask for one. When something was said about it on his taking the place, he laughed, and declared, "Two entrances to my castle are enough for a man of my inches."

The tenant of the top floor of the bakery was Mr. Oscar Leigh. The room over the hall was his bed-room: the

room over the store was his sitting-room ; the room looking into Welbeck Place was his workshop.

Mr. Oscar Leigh made an unclassified exception to the rule of not wearing broadcloth in Chetwynd Street. He never was seen there in anything else. The residents took no offence at his glossy black frock-coat. The extreme oddness of his figure served as an apology for his infringement upon the rules. In Chetwynd Street the little man was very affable, very gallant, very popular. "Quite the gentleman," ladies of the locality who enjoyed his acquaintance declared. Among the men he was greatly respected. They believed him to be very rich, notwithstanding that he pleaded poverty for living so high up as the top floor of Forbes's bakery, and dispensing with a servant. Mrs. Bolger, the old charwoman, came in the morning and got him his breakfast, and tidied his rooms. That is she tidied the sitting-room and bed-room. No one had ever been admitted to the workshop. Mrs. Bolger left about noon, and that was all the attendance Mr. Leigh needed for the day. He got his other meals out of his lodgings.

The men of the district in addition to believing him rich credited him with universal knowledge. "Mr. Leigh," they said, "knew everything." They always spoke of him as "Mr." Leigh because they were sure he had money. If they believed him to be poor or only comfortable they would have called him little Leigh. His appearance was so uncommon they readily endowed him with supernatural powers. But upon the whole they held his presence among them as a compliment to their own worth, and a circumstance for congratulation, for his conversation when unintelligible seemed to do no one harm, when intelligible was pleasant, and he was free with his society, his talk, and his money.

That Thursday afternoon he walked slowly along Chetwynd Street from the eastern end, nodding pleasantly to those he knew slightly, and exchanging cheerful greetings with those he knew better. When he came to the Hanover public-house, lying between him and his own home, he entered, and, keeping to the right down a short passage, found himself in the private bar.

The Hanover was immeasurably the finest public-house

in the neighbourhood. The common bar was plain and rough, and frequented by very plain and rough folk; but the private bar was fitted in mahogany and polished white metal. There no drink of less price than twopence was served, and people in the neighbourhood thought it quite genteel and select. A general feeling prevailed among the men who frequented the private bar of the "Hanover" that the only difference between the best West End club and it was that in the former you got more display, finer furniture, and a bigger room; but that for excellence of liquor and company the latter was the better of the two. It was a well-known fact that Mr. Jacobs, the greengrocer who came from Sloane Street to get three-pennyworth of the famous Hanover rum hot, never smoked anything less than cigars which he bought cheap of his friend, Mr. Isaacs, at sixpence each. It was a custom for the frequenters in turn to say now and then to Mr. Jacobs, "That's a good cigar, Mr. Jacobs; my word, a good cigar." At which challenge Mr. Jacobs became grave, took the cigar out of his mouth and looked at it carefully while he held it as though making up his mind about its merits, and then said "Ay, sir; pretty fair—pretty fair," or other modest words to that effect. He spoke almost carelessly at such times, as though he had something else on his mind. About once a month he thought he was reserving followed and he added: "I bought a case of them from my friend, Isaacs of Bond Street. They come to about sixpence each." After this he would put his cigar back into his mouth, roll it round carelessly between his lips, and take no more heed of it than if he had bought it for twopence across the counter.

When Mr. Oscar Leigh found himself in the private bar, neither Mr. Jacobs nor anyone else was there. Behind the bar in his shirt-sleeves was the potman who attended to the ordinary customers, and Mr. Williams, the proprietor, in a tweed coat of dark and sober hue.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Williams," said the new-comer, wriggling up on a high cane-seated stool, pulling out a white handkerchief and rubbing his face vigorously, puffing loudly the while.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Leigh," said the landlord in a

gracious and pleasant voice. "Very hot walking out of doors."

"Very. Will you have a brandy—a split?"

"It's almost too hot. But I will for the sake of company, as you are kind enough to ask me."

The landlord busied himself getting the drinks, and then set them on the counter. Mr. Leigh took his up, nodded to Williams, saying laconically, "Health," to which the other responded in due form. The hunchback drained his glass at one draught, the landlord sipped his.

"I wanted that badly," said Leigh.

"It's good stuff. Anything wrong?"

"Well, Mr. Williams, it is my breakfast and dinner—up to this."

"Ah. That's bad. Why didn't you get your breakfast. A man isn't any good unless he eats a hearty breakfast, I say. What's the matter, Mr. Leigh. Anything wrong down in the country?"

"No, no. I feel better already. As you say, that's fine brandy. Give me another. I'm tired. I've had such a morning. I feel better, a good deal better. Isn't it hot?"

"Blazing. So you have had a busy morning?"

"Yes. Oh, very busy morning, Mr. Williams. No breakfast yet, but this," tapping the second glass of brandy and soda. "I must be careful not to knock up my digestion, Mr. Williams. When a man's digestion is upset he isn't fit for figures, for calculations, you know. It takes a man all his time, and the coolest head he can saw off a brass monkey, to make calculations such as I deal in."

"You're a wonderful man, and I always say it." Mr. Williams was a personable, good-looking man, with a large white face and lardy skin. He believed that Mr. Leigh knew a vast number of things, and that he himself had a great reserve of solid wisdom which, for reasons undefined to himself, he kept inactive for his own secret pleasure, as a man might hoard a priceless jewel, gloating over the mere sense of possession. He had a firm conviction that if it were only possible to mould Mr. Leigh's mind and his own into one, the compound might be trusted to perform prodigies, always provided that Mr. Leigh had little or nothing to do with the direction of its activities.

Up to this point of the conversation it had been obvious the two men were not speaking freely. Williams was hesitating and laconic beyond his custom; Leigh was too vivacious, tired, exhausted. During the pauses of their talk the pair frequently looked at one another in a way which would have provoked inquiry.

Mr. Williams at last made a backward jerk of his head at the potman, and then a sideway nod of his head towards the door leading into the bar-parlour. The gesture meant plainly, "Shall I get rid of him?"

Leigh nodded quickly and cordially.

"Tom," said the landlord, turning fully round and putting his back against the bar, "the bitter is off. Go down and put on another."

"Right sir," said Tom, as he hurried away.

As soon as he was out of view, and before he could be heard among the casks and pipes, Mr. Williams turned round and said, leaning over the counter and speaking in a whisper: "He's gone. No one can hear now."

Mr. Leigh sprinkled some eau-de-cologne from a tiny silver flask in his palm, buried his face in his hands and inhaled the perfume greedily. "Hah! That is so refreshing. Hah!" The long lean hands, with the glossy shining black hairs, shook as he held them an inch from his face. The withdrawal of the potman seemed to have relieved him of restraint.

"Well," he said, laying both his thumbs on the pewter top of the counter, and pressing hard with his forefingers under the leaf of the counter, "you were saying, Williams —?" He looked into the face of the other with quick blinking eyes and swayed his misshapen body slowly to and fro.

"I wasn't saying anything at all," said the landlord, raising his black, thin, smooth eyebrows half-way up his pallid, smooth, greasy forehead.

"I know," whispered Leigh eagerly. He now drew himself up close to the counter. "I meant what you were going to say. Did you watch?" keenly and anxiously.

"I did."

"At between twelve and one?"

"Yes."

"And did you see anything?" tremulously.

"I did," stolidly.

"What? Tell me what you saw?"

"You told me a man was to come and wind up your clock, as near to twelve as could be, and you asked me to watch him, and keep an eye on him, to time his coming, and see that he was sharp to his hour and that he wound up the machinery by the left-hand lever close to the window."

"Quite right; quite right. I wanted to find out if the fellow would be punctual and do my work for me while I was away in the country, down in Millway. Did you see him come? Did you see him come in through the shafts and straps and chains?" The blinking of the eyes had now ceased and Leigh was staring fixedly, with dark devouring eyes upon the pallid, lardy, stolid face of the publican.

"No, I did not see him come. The window," pointing up to the top window of the house at the opposite corner of the road, "was dark at twelve by our clock."

"By *your* clock. But *your* clock is always five minutes fast, isn't it? You didn't forget *your* clock is *always* five minutes fast?"

"No, I did not forget that. Our clock is fast to allow us to clear the house at closing time. But I thought he might be a few minutes too soon."

"He couldn't. He couldn't be a minute too soon. He couldn't be a second too soon. He couldn't be the ten thousandth part of a second too soon."

Williams smiled slightly. "Couldn't be a second too soon, Mr. Leigh! What's a second? Why *that*!" He tapped his hand on the pewter top of the counter before and after saying the word "that."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Williams, he couldn't have been there the one millionth part of a second before the stroke of twelve. But go on. Go on. I am all anxiety to hear if he was punctual. Tell me what you *did* see." His eyes were blazing with haste.

"Well, you are a strange man, and a positive man too. At twelve by my clock the room was dark. We were very busy then. I looked up again at six minutes past twelve by *my* clock here, a minute past twelve by my own watch,

which I always keep right by Greenwich, and it's a good chronometer, as you know——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the little man hastily. "It's a good watch. Go on!"

"Light was in the room then. A dull light such as you have when you're at work."

"Yes, dim on account of my weak eyes. And by the light you saw——?"

"I saw a man sitting in your place, and in a few seconds he began to wind up the machinery by the lever on the left near the window."

"You saw him working at the lever?" in a voice almost inaudible.

"Yes."

"You saw him often between that and closing time? between that and half-past twelve?"

"Well, yes, I may say often. Three or four times any way."

"And each time he was winding up the machinery?"

"Now and then."

"Hah! Only now and then."

"About as often as you yourself would, it seemed to me."

"And, tell me, did you see his face. Did he waste any of his precious time gaping out of the window into the bar?"

"He turned his head towards the window only once, while I was watching, and I saw him plain enough."

"What was he like. Very like me?"

"Like you, Mr. Leigh! Not he! Not a bit like you! Stop, are you trying if I am speaking the truth?" Williams became suddenly suspicious, ready to resent any imputation upon his word.

"No, no, no. My dear Williams. Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Only I am most desirous to know all facts, all you saw. You know how well I have guarded the secrets of my great clock. I am most anxious that no one but this man who wound the clock for me last night should learn anything about it. Suppose he let several people into the room, I should have all my secrets pried into and made common property."

"And can't he tell everybody if he cares to betray you?"

"Not very well. He cannot. He is deaf and dumb, and can't write," with a triumphant smile. "Describe what the man you saw was like."

"Well you are a wonderful man, Mr. Leigh. He was a broad-shouldered big man with fair hair and beard. He wore a round hat the whole time, and, like you, sat very steady when he was not winding up."

"That's he! That's he to the life! I told him how to sit. I showed him how to sit. And tell me, when closing time came he stood up and wriggled out of the clock?"

"I did not see. We were shut a minute before half-past twelve by my own watch. I kept my eyes on him until half-past twelve. He must have turned out the light before he got up, for the gas went out at half-past twelve, just as he stopped working the lever."

"Yes. And did you watch a while after, to see there was no danger of fire?"

"Yes, a minute or two, but all kept dark and I knew he was gone."

"Hah! Thank you very much, Williams. I am very, very much obliged to you."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Williams, it's a great deal. If you want to do me another favour say nothing about the matter. I don't want anyone to know this man was in my workshop. A lot of curious and envious thieves would gather round him and try to get some of my secrets out of him."

"All right. I'll say nothing."

Leigh took out his little silver flask of eau-de-cologne, moistened his hands with the perfume and drew the pungent fragrant vapour noisily into his nose. "So refreshing," he whispered audibly, "so refreshing." Then lifting his face out of his hands he held the flask toward the landlord, saying, "Try some. It's most refreshing."

"Pah, no," said Williams with a gesture of scorn, "I never touch such stuff."

"Hah! If you were like me you would. If you were always reeking with oil, steeping in the fish-oil of machines, you'd be glad enough to take the smell of it out of your

nose with any perfume. I told you I had been busy this morning. The want of my breakfast, and the business I was on, pretty nearly knocked me up. Bah! The dust of that job is in my throat still."

"Drink up your brandy and soda and have another with me," said the landlord encouragingly.

"No, no. I won't have any more. Hah! it was a dusty job."

"What was it, Mr. Leigh, may I ask?"

"Well, you have done me a good turn in keeping your eye on that fellow for me, and you're going to do me another good turn by saying nothing about it; so I'll tell you. Have you ever heard anything of Albertus Magnus?"

"Albertus Magnums? No, I never heard of magnums of that brand."

"Hah! 'Tisn't a wine, but a man. Albertus Magnus was a man who studied magic, one of the greatest of the magicians of old. He attributes wonderful powers to the powdered asphaltum of mummies."

"Oh, magnums of Mumm? Of course I have heard of magnums of Mumm."

"No! I don't mean wine; the mummy coffins were filled with a kind of pitch, and Albertus attributes wonderful powers to this old pitch which the ancient Egyptians poured hot over the dead. It was used by the Egyptians to prevent the ravages of time upon the faces of the dead. Now, I am going to paint the dials of my clock with mummy-pitch to prevent time ravaging the faces of my clock. Do you see? Hah!"

"I always said, Mr. Leigh, that you were a wonderful, a most wonderful man." Williams's mind had been plunged by the words of the other into a dense mist. He could see nothing and he was sure there must be a wonderfully profound meaning in the speaker's words because he could make nothing of them.

"And to-day I bought a mummy, the mummy of a great Egyptian prince, for I must have good mummy asphaltum to preserve the faces of my clock from the influence of time. Asphaltum is a bituminous pitch, as you know," said Leigh, getting down off the high stool and preening himself like a bedraggled raven.

By this time Williams began to realize that the dwarf had, for some reason or other, with a view to use in some unknown way, become possessed of a mummified prince. He had never before spoken to any one who owned a mummy; he knew, by report, that such things were to be seen in the British Museum, but he had never been inside the walls of that crushing looking fane of history. It was utterly impossible for him to imagine any way in which a mummy could be employed; but this only went to prove how necessary to Leigh a mummy must be. Now that he came to think of the matter he found himself surprised Leigh had not had a mummy long ago. His face relaxed into a smile. "And what are you going to do with his royal highness?" he asked, chuckling.

"I only want the asphaltum as a pigment."

"But what are you going to do with his royal highness?" he repeated, being slow to relinquish this cleverness of his, which to him had the rare glory of a joke.

"Oh," said Leigh, preparing to go, "I am told they burn beautifully. What do you say to burning him as a guy in Welbeck Place on the fifth of November? Ha-ha-ha!" and with a harsh laugh the little man hurried out of the Hanover, leaving Mr. Williams pleased and puzzled.

CHAPTER VI.

OSCAR LEIGH'S CAVE OF MAGIC.

WHEN Mr. Oscar Leigh emerged from the door of the public house, he crossed to the other side of Welbeck Place and moved rapidly along the front of Forbes's bakery until he reached the private entrance to that house. Then he opened the door with a latch-key and entered. In the hall there was nothing but a small hand-truck standing up against the wall. He ascended four flights of stairs, found himself opposite the door of his flat, opened that door with another latch-key, and went in.

The door at the head of the stairs rose up from the edge of the topmost step so that there was no landing outside it.

The whole depth of the landing was enclosed by the door and belonged to the tenant. The little man slammed the door behind him and went down a passage leading east. He came to the sitting-room, passed through it, then through the sleeping chamber beyond and thence into a completely dark passage, out of which opened two doors, one into the sleeping chamber from which he had come, and one into the workshop or clock-room. The latter door he unlocked with a small patent key. He pushed the door open very cautiously. Before the space between the edge and the jamb was an inch wide, some small object placed on the inside against the door, fell with a slight noise. He now pushed boldly, entered, and closed the door behind him. It shut with a snap and he was locked in.

The noise of some object falling had been caused by the over-turning of a small metal egg-cup on the floor. It had been so placed that the door could not be pushed open from the passage without upsetting it, for a strip of wood two inches wide was fixed on the door an inch and a half from the ground and this ledge touched the egg-cup while the door was shut and pressed against the upper rim of the cup the moment the door began to move inward. Around the spot on which the vessel had fallen spread a little pool of liquid on the floor.

Leigh stooped, dipped the tip of his long thin left forefinger in the liquid and then touched the top of his tongue with the wet tip of his finger. A gleam of satisfaction and triumph shone on his face. "Sweet," he whispered, as he straightened his crooked figure. "Sweet as sugar! Any fool who wanted to find if his sanctuary had been defiled by strange feet during his absence, might think of placing a vessel of water against the inside of his door. There is nothing easier than to draw it up close to the door from the outside. All you have to do is to place the vessel on a long slip of paper in the line of the door, and then, having shut the door, draw the paper carefully under the door and away from beneath the vessel. The ground must be level and the paper smooth, and you must have a nice ear and a steady hand. Any fool could manage that."

"Then if defiling hands opened the door and overturned the vessel and spilt the water, and the hands belonged to a

head that wasn't that quite of a fool, the hands could replace the vessel full of water against the shut door as it had first been placed there. But the sugar was a stroke of genius, of my genius! Who that did not know the secret would think of putting sugar in the water?" Leigh touched his tongue again with the tip of his finger. "Sweet as honey. Here is conclusive proof that my sanctuary has been inviolate while I have been from home. Poor Williams! A useful man in his way; very. One of those men you turn to account and then sling on a dung-hill to rot. A worthy soul. I have succeeded in my first great experiment. I wonder how it goes with my dumb deputy of last night? Ha-ha-ha!"

He turned away from the door and confronted a thicket of shafts and rods and struts and girders and pipes and pulleys and wheels and drums and chains and levers and cranks and weights and springs and cones and cubes and hammers and cords and bands and bells and bellows and gongs and reeds, through all of which moved a strange weird tremulousness and plaintive perpetual low sounds, and little whispers of air and motion, as though some being, hitherto uncreate, were about to take visible life out of inertia, and move in the form of a vast harmonious entity in which all this distracting detail of movement would emerge into homogeneous life.

From where Oscar Leigh stood, contemplating his machine, it would be absolutely impossible for anything stouter than a wand to reach the one window through the interminable complicacies of the clock.

Again a look of satisfaction and triumph came into his narrow swarthy face as he muttered, "Even if anyone had got as far as where I stand, he could stir no further without unintentionally blazing his way as plainly as ever woodman did with axe in Canadian forest."

The framework of the clock consisted of four upright polished steel pillars, one at each angle of a parallelogram. The pillars touched the ceiling of the room about nine feet from the floor. One side of the parallelogram measured twelve feet, the other ten. The sole window in the room was in the middle of one of the larger sides of the parallelogram, and could be approached only through the body of

the clock itself. The body of the clock close by the window was not fully filled up with mechanism, and this free space, combined with the embrasure of the window, made a small interior chamber, in which were a stout high-backed easy Windsor chair, and an oak watchmaker's bench. The framework of the clock was secured to the floor by screws.

From the outside, where Leigh now stood leaning his back against the wall, it was impossible to approach the window except through the body of the clock; for the mechanism filled all the space from floor to ceiling, and with the exception of the bay around the window, all the space from the outer pillars to the wall.

The main body of the mechanism within the four polished steel pillars filled about half the room. In the remainder, which took the form of a narrow passage running round three sides of the clock, were small pieces of mechanism, some detached from the main body, some connected by slender shafts or tiny bands. This passage contained a single chair, a small oak table, and a narrow stretcher bed.

After a long and searching look through the metallic network of the machine, Oscar Leigh sat down on the one chair, and resting his elbow on the table, gave himself up to thought.

The ticking, and clicking, and clanking, and whizzing, and buzzing of the machinery made altogether no louder sound than the noise of a busy thoroughfare in London, and there was no perceptible vibration. In that room Leigh was completely unconscious of sound. While all the machinery went as designed, he heard nothing of it unless he bent his attention upon hearing. If any movement became irregular, or any movement that ought to go on suddenly stopped, he would have been as much startled as though a pistol had been exploded at his ear. So long as all went well he heard nothing of it. When he began to work at the clock he indulged in the habit of telling himself aloud what he was meaning to achieve with the mechanism; later he altered his method, and told the clock what it was going to do, speaking to it as if it were a docile child of enormous potentialities. Later still, he spoke much aloud to himself on many subjects when in the

loneliness of his isolated lodging; he knew that distance from people secured him from being overheard, and the sound of his own voice mitigated his solitude. Here in this place, the sound of his own voice was often the only way he had of assuring himself that he had still power independent of the machine, that all his movements were not because of some weight or spring involved in the bewildering intricacies of the clock.

"Ay," he said, this Thursday afternoon, crossing one of his short legs over the other. "I have succeeded so far in my labours here. I began my clock as an excuse, as a cloak to cover"—he waved his hand as if to waft aside smoke before his eyes, although he was not smoking—"to cover any other matter that might come my way. It has grown on me from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, until it has swelled in size and efficacy altogether beyond my original designs or desires. I wished to have a slave that might be used as an excuse for solitariness and eccentricity in dealing quietly in precious metals and precious stones, and now I find myself face to face with a master. Whither will this master lead me? I do not know. I do not care. I first intended this room as a chamber of mystery; it has become a cave of magic. My heart ought to be drunk with joy. My heart would be drunk with joy only for—" He paused and waved his hand once more before his eyes as if to clear the air before him. "Only for that girl. This mere girl, this mere Edith Grace, this mere Edith Grace whom I have seen but—"

He paused and rose. An unusual sound in the street aroused him.

"What noise is that in the street? Something out of the common in Welbeck Place."

He caught hold of one of the polished steel pillars that formed the framework of the breathing machine and dropped his chin on his misshapen chest. "With care I could now become rich—no matter how. A fortnight ago I brought all my arrangements to perfection. I have hit upon a plan for transcending the wonders of mystery gold with its tin and platinum and copper imposture. I have hit upon a plan of making miracle gold! Ay!

miracle gold, the secret of which will die with me when it has served my purpose. I can be rich and give my poor old mother every luxury and pleasure riches may secure for one so old and so afflicted. A fortnight ago I had made up my mind to go on with the manufacture of miracle gold. I am but a weak, fickle creature, I who had been so firm and strong, and whole hearted! I who had been as whole hearted as I am marred bodied! I advertise for a companion for my poor old mother and I see this girl, this Edith Grace, with her airs and graces and high notions.

"I took that sight of her as a sign, as a bid for my soul, for my better self. I said to myself, 'Will you forego the miracle gold and cleave to her instead?' I would have given all the fair gold and foul gold in the world for her, with her airs and graces and high notions. A man must fill his heart with something, no matter in what kind of a body that heart may be lodged. I had made up my mind to fill it with the god of wealth. I had made up my mind to erect the throne of Plutus in my soul. I would make gold, some way, and I had lighted upon an ingenious method, an original method, an old alchemy under a new name, and then I saw her, and my resolve was shaken, it crumbled down with Plutus and his throne.

"And now she will not have me, she will not rest under the roof to which I am free, she flees from me as from vile contagion, and I am driven back upon this miracle gold. Timmons will be here with some of it to-night. That is the first step on the way Down——

"There's that noise again below. Let me see what it is."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEGRO JUGGLER.

MEANWHILE two unusual things had taken place in Chetwynd Street; from the western end (the street ran nearly due east and west) the canons regarding broadcloth had

been violated once more, for John Hanbury, twenty-six years of age, of independent fortune, had entered it in a black frock coat and low black felt hat, with Dora Ashton, aged twenty, to whom he was privately engaged to be married. Dora had never seen any of the poorer parts of London, and he, after much expostulation and objection, consented to escort her through Chetwynd Street, not a mile distant from Westminster Abbey.

At the eastern end, William Sampson, Negro, and Street Entertainer, had entered, passed down the street until he came to Welbeck Place, and there prepared to perform, hoping to win a few coppers from the loungers about the mews and the Hanover public-house. Men with faces blackened by pursuit of various trades and arts were common in Chetwynd Street; but a black man, wholly a product of nature, was a rare visitor.

"I—I never was in a place of this kind before, Jack," said Dora Ashton, clinging more closely to Hanbury's arm as they moved along the left-hand side of the street.

"I should think not," he said shortly. He did not like the expedition at all. He was not accustomed to wearing a round topped hat when escorting a lady in London; but on this occasion he put one on rather than provoke the inhabitants to throw brickbats at him. When Dora suggested that he should wear a tweed coat he declined point blank. A line must be drawn somewhere.

"I'm—I'm not in—in the *least* afraid, Jack," she said with grave tremulousness in her fresh voice.

"Not in the least, of course!" he said ungraciously, scornfully. "But you *would* come, you know. Nice place, eh? Nice looking houses, eh? Aren't you glad you came?" His manner was contemptuous, almost fierce. Jack Hanbury had the reputation of being clever, extremely clever. He was very fond of Dora, but like many clever young men, he had a great scorn of women when they assumed, or took an interest in things out of their sphere. Dora knew the impetuous, volcanic nature of Jack, and, under ordinary circumstances, admired and smiled at his outbursts, for she knew that while they might be provoked by her, personally, they were not directed against her personally, but against her sex generally.

"Indeed, Jack, you wrong me, if you think I am alarmed. I am only surprised, not frightened."

"You would come, you know," he repeated, a little softened. The heart of the man would be hard indeed, if he could be insensible to the beauty of her face and her voice, and the touch of her trembling, confiding, delicate, brown-gloved hand.

With a little shudder of reassurance, she looked round. "And, Jack, are these the people who live here?"

"Yes," he answered, moving his eyes from right to left in disdain, "these are the people who live here. I told you they weren't nice. Are they? How should you like to live here in *this* part of Westminster?"

She shuddered again and pressed his arm to convince herself of his presence and protection. "It is of no consequence whether I should like to live here or not——"

"No; because you are not obliged to live here."

"That is not what I was going to say. It is of no consequence whether I should like to live here or not. What is of consequence is that these poor people have to live here, Jack."

"They aren't people at all, I tell you. The *people* of no country are people in the sense of fine ladies."

"Jack!" she said, in protest and expostulation.

"They are not people, I say. It is only philanthropists and other idle men, and those who want the applause of the crowd, who call them people. Look at him, for instance. There is a creature who is more than one of the people. He is a Man, and a Brother too. Ugh!" Hanbury turned away in disgust.

William Sampson the negro, a tall man with round shoulders and restless eyes, was gesticulating violently, at the open end of Welbeck Place, and addressing loud speech, apparently to the first-floor windows of the houses opposite him in Chetwynd Street.

"What is he, Jack?" asked the girl, whose composure was gradually returning.

"Can't you see, he's a Nigger?"

"I know. But what is he going to do? Why is there a crowd gathering about him?"

The two drew up under the windows which the Negro

seemed to be addressing. A couple of dozen people had drifted near the Negro, who was now declaring, in stentorian voice, that he undertook to perform feats hitherto unattempted by man.

"I don't know what he's going to do, at first. Collect money in the end, I am certain. Conjuring; balancing straws or chairs; fire-eating, or something of that kind. Would you like to stay and see, Dora?" His manner softened still further, and he bent his body towards her in a caressing and lover-like way.

She looked up and down, apprehensively. "Yes, if you are not afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid!" he laughed, "afraid of what? You do not think he is a cannibal? and even if he were, they don't permit Niggers to eat harmless English folk in the public streets of London. The days for that kind of thing are gone by here," and he laughed again.

She looked at him protestingly. "You know I didn't mean any such folly. You ought to know what I did mean."

"I confess I don't. Tell me what you did mean."

She coloured slightly. "I meant did you think this is a fit place for me to stand still in?"

He became grave all at once and glanced hastily around. "No one of your acquaintance will see you here, if you mean that."

"Then I will stay," she answered with a little sigh. She had not dreaded any one seeing her. Jack was very dull, she thought.

He caught a look of disappointment on her face, and gathered from it that he had not answered her question as she expected. He added quickly: "They will not molest you, if that is your doubt."

She shook her head. "I cannot bear—it's very silly, I know—I cannot bear to hear people say dreadful things. Will that Negro swear, Jack?"

He laughed. "That Negro swear! Oh, dear no. The Lord Chamberlain would not license the piece if there were any bad language in it. Let us cross over, Dora, if you would really care to see. You may be sure he will use no bad language. He would not dare go half as

far in that way as the writer of a comedy for a Quaker audience."

The two crossed and stood in front of Forbes's bakery, a few yards from the thin crowd around the Negro. The people noticing that the young girl and her companion were well dressed, fell back a little right and left to leave a clear view of the performer. The people did this not from servility or courtesy, but that the Negro might benefit by the contribution from the well-off strangers.

The Negro turned his face towards John Hanbury and Dora Ashton. He had beside him, on the ground, two cubes of stone, one the size of an iron half-hundredweight, the other somewhat bigger. In his hand he held a small square of thin board.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "like a great opera singer, I earn the bread I put into my mouth with the mouth I put it into. I have a lovely mouth," opening an enormous cavern and showing a magnificent set of teeth, the lower row of which projected half an inch beyond the upper.

Dora shuddered and clung closer to her companion. Hanbury straightened his back and squared his shoulders, and whispered: "Don't be afraid, Dora." He was tall and powerful, and solid-looking for a man of six-and-twenty. He could have answered for any man among the spectators. The Negro stood half-a-head taller, and looked powerful and stubborn. Hanbury surveyed him curiously and finished his examination by thinking, "I shouldn't mind taking him on. I dare say he knows how to use his fists." He himself had taken lessons with the gloves, and was a creditable amateur in the art. Young amateur boxers always look on every strange man as a possible antagonist. Hanbury felt great pleasure in his own physical prowess when he thought of the hand of the young girl on his arm and looked down at the pale olive face and into the confiding hazel eyes. "Don't be afraid," he murmured.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen," the Negro went on, "I grind my own corn with my own mill-stones," showing his fine, large white teeth. "Men in Parliament are celebrated for their jaw, so am I. I am like them all round. With

my teeth and my mouth and my jaw, I get my living. Here is my stock in trade," patting his chin and cheek and teeth, "and I never can sell them that puts faith in me, as the Parliament men do, for these here things of mine would be no use to anyone else, and I couldn't sell 'em the same as votes if I would." He made a hideous grimace, at which there was another laugh mingled with a cheer.

This laugh brought Mr. Williams, landlord of the Hanover, to his door, and finally into the street. He glanced at the Negro and the crowd with benignant toleration, then turning his eyes upwards he saw Leigh at the window, whither he had been attracted by the noise of the crowd. The window was open, and Leigh was leaning out and watching the group below.

Williams called out to the hunchback, "His trumpeter isn't dead," nodding to the Negro. "Come down Mr. Leigh, and see the fun." A man who could afford to give good English money for a dead Egyptian prince would surely be interested in a living African black, whom he could see and hear for nothing.

Leigh hesitated for a moment, then called out, "All right," and disappeared from the window.

Meanwhile the athlete was continuing his harangue. Such artistes are prodigal of personal history, reticent of the feats they intend to perform. This one told the audience his name was William Sampson, but that the President of the United States, King Ja-Ja, and the Emperor of China, called him Black Sam, when he dined with them in private. "The ladies, who are to a man fond of me, call me Black Sam too. You may laugh, but you won't see me blush when you laugh at me. You don't find this Nigger so green as to blush because he's popular with the ladies. Not me! I was born at midnight, in the Black Country near Brummagem, that accounts for my dark complexion, and I'm in mourning for my great grandfather, Adam, which accounts for my being called Sam, and also for my nobby head of hair."

He paused awhile, and walked round the two cubes of stone which he had placed on the ground. He surveyed them as though they were living animals of priceless value.

Then he returned to his first position facing Welbeck Place, and resumed :

"I carry them stones there about with me to prove to any man, who won't take my word for it, that I am the strongest jawed man in all the world. Ladies and gentlemen, when I was last in America, I went out West. You have often heard of the Rocky Mountains—there," pointing to the stones, "there they are. Now I am going to prove my words to you."

"What will he do with the stones, Jack?" whispered Dora, with some apprehension of danger.

"Eat them," answered Hanbury in a whisper. "Didn't you hear him say so?"

At this point Oscar Leigh opened the side door of Forbes's bakery, the door in Welbeck Place, and stepped into the street.

"You're just in time," shouted Williams, across the street, "He's going to begin."

John Hanbury, with Dora Ashton on his arm, was standing at the curb on the footway in Chetwynd Place against the blank wall of Forbes's bakery.

About fifty people, men, women, and children, were now gathered at the head of Welbeck Place. Half a dozen men stood behind the Negro, between him and the gateway of Welbeck Mews, at the end of the place. There was a clear view of the Negro from where Hanbury and Miss Ashton stood, and from where Williams the landlord lounged directly opposite. When Leigh reached Williams's side nothing intervened between him and the stranger except the Negro.

Leigh took up his place by the landlord, without a word, and stood leaning heavily on his stick. He fixed his quick, piercing eyes on the Negro.

Black Sam had finished his introductory speech, and was getting ready for his performance. His preparations consisted in violent gestures menacing the four cardinal points of the heavens, and then the four cardinal points of earth, and finally the two stone cubes on the ground in front of him.

Leigh watched with a cynical smile. "What is he going to do with the stones, landlord?"

"Try which is the hardest, his head or them," said Williams, with a laugh. He had a great turn for humour when in the open air near his house.

"Then the stones are going to have a bad time?" said Leigh.

The Negro first took up the smaller block, tossed it high into the air, and let it fall on the road, saying, in a defiant voice, "Eighteen pounds." Then he took the larger block, and treating it in the same way, said, "Twenty-four pounds. The two together forty-two pounds!"

"And not an ounce more taken off for cash down?" said a man in the crowd.

"Any gentleman that doubts my word is at liberty to weigh them. If I am a pound out, I'll stand a bottle of champagne to the men, give a shilling's worth of jujubes to the children, and present each lady here with a gold wedding-ring." The people laughed.

"And a husband?" asked the man who had spoken before.

"And the best husband in this whole country—meaning myself." He placed his hand on his heart and bowed profoundly.

The people were in the best of good humour, except the children, who thought that a serious matter, such as jujubes, was being treated with disgraceful levity.

Then Black Sam began a series of tricks with the stones. Before starting, he placed on the ground the square piece of white thin board he held in his hand. It was about a quarter of an inch thick, and six inches by four. Then he balanced a stone on the point of the first finger of each hand, and then jerked the lesser stone from the point of his left fore-finger to the top of the larger stone, still balanced on the fore-finger of his right hand, and kept both upright on the point of his right fore-finger for half a minute.

Suddenly he dropped both towards the ground together, and kicking away the heavier one as they fell caught the lighter one on the toe of his left foot, flung this stone into the air, and received and retained it on his right shoulder.

"That must hurt his shoulder dreadfully," whispered Dora.

"Padded and resined," said Hanbury laconically, unsym-

pathetically. He was interested in the performance by this time. It was new to him, and an amateur athlete is always wanting to know, although always extremely knowing.

The Negro stooped carefully, seized the larger stone, threw it a few feet into the air, and caught and balanced it on the top of the smaller one still resting on his shoulder.

"Good," said Hanbury, in the tone of a connoisseur, who although he knows much, is not ungenerous.

The people applauded out loud, and twopence were cast on the ground close to the black man's huge feet. He smiled at the applause, and affected to know nothing of the twopence. The mercenary spirit ought not to exist in the bosom of the real artiste—for pence, anyway.

Black Sam shook his back, and the two stones fell to the ground. Then he stooped once more and took up the piece of flat white board and placed it between his gleaming teeth, rolling back his lips so that the spectators might see the white teeth closed upon the white wood. His lower jaw projected enormously, even for a Negro. By no motion of the lower jaw could its front teeth be made to meet the front teeth of the upper.

"Going to bolt the timber?" asked the landlord of the Hanover, with a laugh and a wink at Leigh.

The Negro took no notice of the question. Leigh did not see the wink. Something more wonderful than the contortions of Black Sam had at that moment attracted Leigh's attention. He had caught sight of Dora Ashton; the roadway between her and him was free save for the Negro, and Leigh's eyes had travelled beyond the burly man of colour and were fixed on the slender form and pale olive face of the girl, with an expression of amazement. He looked like an animal that suddenly sees something it dreads, and from which it desires to remain concealed. He seemed stupefied, stunned, dazed. All the scorn had gone out of his face. He leaned forward more heavily than formerly on his crooked stick. He appeared to doubt the evidence of his senses.

The Negro went on with his performance.

John Hanbury's attention was wholly absorbed in Black Sam. Leigh never took his fascinated gaze off the girl at Hanbury's side. Hanbury was an athlete examining the

feats of another athlete. Leigh was a man looking at the incredible, seeing the invisible, beholding in full daylight a ghost whom he must not challenge, and whom he cannot leave. Dora was watching with mingled fear, disgust and pity, the dangerous gyrations of a man of pathetically low type, a man who seemed in his own person connecting the race of man with the race of beasts, as put forth in recent theories.

With a piece of wood in his mouth, Black Sam made the circuit of the little crowd. The line of gleaming white teeth upon the line of white wood in the distorted ebony face made the head seem cut in two at the line of the folded back upper lip, and the polished upper part of the head with its rolling eyes, as if placed on a trencher.

At length he took up his position in the centre of the ring. Then he stooped, raised the lesser stone, and placed it on the piece of white board, now at right angles to the ebony glittering face, and parallel to the horizon.

Then he did a thing that looked horrible.

Still keeping the piece of white board parallel to the horizon, he began slowly leaning his head back. This he did by gradually opening his huge mouth from ear to ear, the piece of wood being jambed in the angle of the jaws, and resting on the teeth of the huge undershot lower jaw. He bent back the upper part of his head until his eyes stared vertically into the unclouded blue sky of the June afternoon. It appeared as if the Negro's lower jaw had been torn down from the skull by the weight of the stone, and would presently be rent from its place and dashed to the ground. The red palate and arch of the gullet were visible above the white tongue of wood lying on the teeth, and jambed into the angles of the jaws above the invisible red tongue of the mouth.

All eyes were fixed on the Negro, all eyes but those of Oscar Leigh. His eyes were rivetted on the face of Dora Ashton.

The crowd watched the Negro, in breathless expectancy. Oscar Leigh watched the girl in amazement, incredulity, fear.

With both hands Black Sam bespoke attention. All saw and responded, all but Oscar Leigh. He had eyes for no

one, nothing but the girl opposite him. He was in a trance of wonder.

Suddenly, while the head remained motionless, the lower jaw of the Negro swept upon its hinges, the piece of wood was brought into swift contact with the upper teeth, and the stone, impelled from the catapult formed by the muscles of the jaws, flew over the Negro's head, and fell to the ground a dozen feet behind his clumsy heels.

There was a shout of applause from all.

Dora drew back with a sigh of relief.

"I never saw anything like that," said the landlord of the Hanover to Oscar Leigh, with the Negro in his mind.

"Nor I," said Oscar Leigh, "anything like it," having the girl opposite in his mind. "Pray excuse me!" He crossed the road, and placed himself on the curb within a couple of paces of where she stood, and stared at her fur-tively with unbelieving eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JUGGLER'S LAST FEAT.

AFTER the shout of applause this time fell a little shower of coppers. The Negro, with as much rapidity as he had before shown deliberateness, placed the heavier stone on the piece of board and shot it still further behind him by the force of the mere muscles of his jaws.

"He's about done now," said the landlord of the Hanover to the air. Leigh was no longer near, and no one else within hail seemed worthy of a prosperous licensed victualler's speech outside his own bar and house. Inside the portals he was a publican, outside he was a private being with individual existence, rights and tastes, an impressively large waistcoat and watch-chain to match, and an opinion of himself out of all proportion with even his waistcoat or watch-chain. When half a man is concealed from you behind a counter, his individuality can never impress you nearly so much as when he stands forth disenthralled from sole to crown. The ordinary man glides into his most

private aspect when he slips behind the door of his own home; the publican when he emerges from his house.

The Negro now took up the two stones and placing the less on the greater and the greater on the white ledge of wood jerked them both together over his head, as easily as he had thrown the light one by itself.

Then he made a gesture for silence. All the spectators were more than attentive, all except Oscar Leigh, who with the air of one in a trance of perplexity and wonder stole glances at the exquisite line of the girl's cheek and forehead; no more of her face could be seen from his position. She was bent forward and breathless with excitement. She had often seen feats of strength and dexterity before, many more wonderful than Sam's; but she had never until now stood in the arena with the performer. The propinquity was fascinating, the presence horrible, the situation novel, exciting, confounding.

Black Sam drew the two stones towards him with his huge unhandsome feet, and stooped down holding the piece of wood still in his mouth. He moved his feet a little this way, a little that, selecting their final resting place with care. He passed the cubes back between his legs and, setting one on the other, sat on the upper of the two, looked up and expanding his chest drew a full breath. The people could not now take their gaze off him if they tried. Still Oscar Leigh had no eyes for him. He watched the girl as though his life, the fate of his soul, depended on not losing sight of her for an instant. "She must have seen me, and yet she does not notice me! Are her presence here and her indifference to my presence the result of magic—of real magic, not charlatan tricks?" he thought.

Black Sam lifted his body a couple of inches, resting his entire weight on his feet, then passing his hands back he slid them under the lower cube, and raised both hands from the ground, the lower cube resting on the palms. With back bent like a bow he thrust out his head, holding the piece of board in his mouth parallel to the horizon, then he swung his body, first forward, then backward, and with a prodigious effort and violent thrust of his arms and head between his legs, threw the two cubes up into the air, straightened himself like a flash, stepped back a pace and,

still holding the piece of white board in his enormous mouth parallel to the horizon, caught the two cubes on it as they fell.

There was a loud cry of exultation. Hanbury forgot the girl by his side, forgot everything but the black man and his feat and shouted :

"Well done by——, Nigger !"

Dora started as though she had been stung. She had more horror of an oath than of a serpent or a blow. She had never heard one so near her before. The words men utter with no thought behind them beyond the desire for emphasis had to her a meaning, not only a meaning through the reason but through the imagination. When she heard the oath her imagination became filled with the spectacle of an august and outraged Presence. Profanity was more horrible to her than almost any other crime. It was a deliberate impiety, a daring and blasphemous insolence.

Hanbury became conscious of the girl's presence by her abrupt withdrawal of her hand from his arm. He turned his eyes, flashing with admiration of the Negro's dexterity and strength. "Wasn't that good?" he asked Dora joyously.

She looked bewildered, and glanced hastily round as though seeking a way of escape. She opened her mouth to speak, but no word came.

"What is it?" he asked in alarm. Are you not well, Dora?"

"Oh, Jack, how dreadful! You terrify me!"

"I—I—I," he cried swiftly, and in sore and sudden perplexity and dismay. He had shouted out the oath without consciousness that he spoke. In a moment his words came back upon his ears and he recollected her dread. He flushed with confusion and remorse. "Oh, Dora, I beg your pardon, I am miserably ashamed of myself. There is no excuse for me; it was the act of a blackguard—worse still, Dora, of a cad. Pray, pray forgive me."

"I—I am frightened now," she said turning pale and swaying slightly to and fro. She looked at the entrance to Welbeck Place; it was by this time choked up with a dense crowd of people watching the performance.

"Would you like to go away, dear? You look ill. Oh,

pray forgive me! What I said was forced from me by the excitement of the moment. It was only the result of a bad habit. There was no meaning in my words."

She began to recover her equanimity. To force a way through that crowd would be very disagreeable to her. She replaced her hand on Hanbury's arm saying: "No. Let us stay and see this out. I am all right again. I am very foolish, Jack. Try to forgive me, Jack."

"Forgive you, my darling! Forgive you for what? The only thing I can't forgive you for is tolerating a beast like me."

"Hush, Jack! Don't speak of it again. I am quite well now, and you are the dearest Jack in the world, only don't say that dreadful thing any more, it makes me quite ill. It may be silly, but I cannot help myself. What is the Negro going to do now? Look?"

"I don't know. I don't care. I only care for you, about you, and here I have distressed you, shocked you. It is horrible. You feared to stay lest the Nigger should use strong language, and now it is I, your protector, who offends against good manners and good morals, and outrages your ears!" He had drawn her close to him by the hand that lay on his arm and was pouring his words in a low voice into her ears, his eyes blazing with earnestness, his face working with solicitude and remorse.

"There, Jack, it is all over and forgiven long ago. If you want to please me, let the matter rest. I am much interested in the performance. I never saw anything like it before. Tell me what he is doing now? I cannot make out. What does he mean by throwing himself down in that way and lying still? What are the people laughing at? Is he ill? Is he hurt? Why doesn't some one go to him? What do these foolish people mean by laughing? The man is hurt? Look, look! They cannot see. They are all in front of him. Look there! What is that oozing under his face? Go, see, help him, Jack. Look under his face on the ground! That is Blood!"

John Hanbury did not move. He too had seen something was wrong. He too saw the swelling pool of bright scarlet blood under the black face of the Negro now lying at full length. Still, he did not move. He had grown

deadly pale and cold and limp. His head felt light, the colour faded out of objects, and everything became a white and watery blue. The light shivered and then grew faint and far away. Sounds waxed thin, attenuated, confused.

"I can't go, Dora. I am not well. I always faint at the sight of blood," and he staggered back, dragging her with him until he leaned against the blank wall of Forbes's bakery. She disengaged her arm from his, and sought to support him with both her hands. His legs suddenly bent under him, and he slipped from her grasp and fell with legs thrust out across the flagway, and back drooping sideways and forward partly supported by the wall.

At that moment Oscar Leigh stepped back from his post on the curb, and uncovering his head, bowed lowly to Dora, and said: "I beg your pardon. Will you allow me to assist you?"

In her haste, confusion, anxiety, Dora glanced but casually at the speaker, saying: "It is not I who want assistance, but he."

"I would assist even my rival for your sake," he said humbly, bowing low and remaining bent before her. "I did not hope to meet you again so soon. I did not think it would be my good luck to meet you once more to-day until I called at Grimsby Street."

The girl looked at Hanbury's recumbent form with anxiety and dread, and then in dire perplexity at the hunchback who had just raised his uncovered head: "If you will be so good as to help me I shall be very much obliged. Oh! I am terrified. But I do not know what you mean by saying you met me to-day. I have, I think, never seen you until now. What shall I do? Is there a doctor here?"

"He has only fainted. Never seen me before! Never at Eltham yesterday! Not to-day! Not this morning, Miss Grace, am I mad?"

"You are mistaken. I never saw you before. My name is not Grace. My name is Ashton, and this is Mr. John Hanbury. Oh! will no one help me?"

The crowd had by this time gathered closely round the prostrate Negro. No one but Leigh was near Miss Ashton and Hanbury.

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Leigh seized Hanbury and drew him away from the wall. "The best thing we can do is to lay him flat. So! The others are too busy with the Nigger, and we are better off without a crowd, they would only keep the air away. Pray, forgive and forget what I said, Miss Ashton. I was sure you were Miss Grace, a lady I know, whom I met yesterday and this morning. Such a likeness never was before, but I can see a little difference now; a difference now that you look at me and speak." He had placed the young man flat on his back, and was gazing up into the face of the girl with a look half of worship, half of fear.

She could not see or hear clearly. "Oh! can nothing be done for him?" she cried piteously. She fell upon her knees beside the prostrate man, and raised his head in her arms.

"Don't do that. Do not raise his head. Have no fear. I will fetch some brandy. Here, bathe his forehead with this. I will be back in a moment." He handed her a small silver flask of eau-de-cologne from which he had screwed the top, and then hastened away.

He skirted the crowd and rushed into the Hanover, crying out "Brandy!" The place was deserted. No one in front of the counter. No one in the bar. With strength and agility, for which none would give him credit, he seized the top of the counter in his long arms, and drew himself up on it, and jumped into the bar, clutched a bottle of brandy from a shelf, and with a glass in his other hand was back over the counter again in a minute, and hurrying to where Dora knelt beside the insensible Hanbury. Leigh knocked the head off the bottle with a blow of his stick, shook out half the brandy to carry away the splinters, and poured some of what was left into the glass.

"Can you open his mouth? Let me try. Raise his head now." He knelt down and endeavoured to force the spirit into Hanbury's mouth. "Now, please, stand up. Leave him to me. You are not strong." She hesitated to rise. "Oh, pray get up! You will only make yourself ill. He will be quite well in a few minutes."

The girl rose. She was trembling violently. She placed one hand against the wall to steady herself. Her breath came short and sharp.

Leigh forced the mouth open and moistened it with brandy and moistened the temples also. Dora, weak and pale and terrified, with lips apart, looked out of dilated eyes down on the swooning man.

In a few seconds he showed signs of life. His eyelids flickered, his chest heaved, his colour began to return, he sighed and raised his hand. Leigh lifted his head higher and forced more of the brandy into his mouth. Then he got up, and stood waiting the result. Gradually Hanbury came to himself, and with the joint aid of Leigh and Dora tottered to his feet.

"There, take some more of this," said Leigh holding out the glass to Hanbury.

The latter passed his hand across his eyes to collect his faculties and clear his vision.

"I must have fainted," he whispered. "Is the man dead? I fainted twice before when I saw blood. Once at the gymnasium. Is he dead?"

"Swallow the stuff," said Leigh. "It will put you right." He looked around. The crowd bearing in its core the form of the Negro, was moving through the archway at the bottom of Welbeck Place into the Mews. "I don't know whether he is really dead or not. It looks like it. Do you feel better?"

"Thank you, I feel quite well again. Would you mind fetching a cab. Dora, I am very sorry for my miserable weakness. I could not help it. I am everlastingly disgraced. Would you be kind enough to fetch a cab?"

The request was addressed to Leigh, who glanced with pity and worship at Dora, and said, without looking away:

"Yes; I'll go for a cab. You are not able to walk yet. Stay here till I come back. Will you have more?" He turned and held out the neckless bottle to Hanbury.

"No, thank you."

Leigh threw the bottle and glass into the road and hastened off on his errand. He had no thought of serving Hanbury. If the young man had been alone Leigh would have left him where he stood until the convalescent was strong enough to shift for himself. But he was under a double spell, the spell of the extraordinary likeness between this girl, Miss Ashton, and that other girl, Miss Grace, and

the spell of Miss Ashton's beauty. As a rule his thought was clear, and sharp, and particular ; now it was misty, dim, glorious, vague. Edith Grace had, at first sight, wrought a charm upon him such as he had never known before ; Dora Ashton renewed and heightened the charm and carried it to an intolerable yearning and rapture. He was beside himself.

"Dora," said Hanbury, after a little while and much thought. "Will you promise me one thing?" He looked around. They were quite alone. The crowd had followed the bearers of the Negro into the mews, through which there was a short cut to an hospital.

"Yes, if I can do what you ask, Jack."

"Say nothing to a soul about my fainting. You will not tell your father or mother, or my mother? I was able to keep the other occasions quiet. If this got about I should have to clear out of London. I'd be the laughing stock of the clubs. That man need not know more than he has seen."

"But he will return with the cab. You can ask him not to say anything about it."

"Come, Dora," he said, with sudden and feverish energy, "let us go. I feel a horrible repugnance to this place."

"But the man with the cab? He will be here in a minute," she said, looking at him in pain and surprise. Surely he was selfish.

"No, no. Not a second. I feel as if I should faint again. There isn't a cab-rank within a mile, and he cannot be back for half-an-hour. Come, Dora."

She took his proffered arm with a view to giving, not receiving, aid, and he hurried her along Chetwynd Street until he met the first cross road leading north ; into this he hastened, casting a quick glance behind, and finding to his great relief that he was not followed. After a couple of hundred yards he reduced the pace, and said, "I am afraid, Dora, I have been going too fast for you ; but I would not wish for anything that my name should get into the newspapers in connection with this miserable affair and place. It would be bad enough to have a fellow's name connected with such a place as Chetwynd Street ; but to have it published that a fellow fainted there because he saw a Nigger

drop dead, would be against a fellow for life. It would be worse than an accusation of crime—it would make a man ridiculous."

"And I wonder," said the girl, looking up quietly at him, "how my name would look in print connected with this miserable affair and place, and that Negro and *you*?"

He stopped short, dropped her arm, and looked at her with an expression of alarm and apology. "Dora, Dora. I beg your pardon. I most sincerely beg your pardon. There is something wrong with me to-day. I never thought of that. You would not, Dora, be very much put out if you saw your name connected with mine in print? Our engagement is not public, but there is no reason it should not."

"Under these circumstances? I should most surely not like the publicity of the papers. But I did not think of that until you spoke of your own name."

He looked at her as she walked now slowly by his side. He felt cut to the quick, and the worst of it was he experienced no resentment, was not cheered and sustained by anger. He had allowed consideration for his own personal risk to swallow up all consideration for everyone else, Dora Ashton included. If a line of soldiers were drawn across this wretched street with levelled rifles, and his moving towards them would draw their fire into his breast, he would there and then have marched up to them rather than that harm should touch Dora.

It was in accordance with Dora's wishes the engagement between them had not been announced. She had views which in the main he shared and admired. She was intensely independent. Why should the world know they were pledged to one another? It was no affair of the world's. But to have her name bracketed with his in newspapers and *then* their engagement announced would be hideous, unbearable to her.

He would freely give his life to save her from hurt, but to be laughed at—Oh! Any man who was half a man would rather die heroically than be laughed at. To be the subject of amusing paragraphs in the sly evening papers! To be ironically complimented on his nerve—Oh! To become a by-word! To hear men at the clubs chuckle and whisper "Nigger!" and then chuckle again and say louder

some word that had nothing to do with the matter ! To be asked significantly if he felt better, and recommended tonics and a bracing climate ! Oh ! To see the hall-porter smile ! To be asked by the waiter if he wished his coffee black ! Oh ! Oh ! Oh !

"There's a cab at the end of the street," she said.

"So there is—a four-wheeler, too." He started at her voice, and then called the cab. "I cannot tell you how much I am ashamed of myself, for the third time to-day," he said to her.

"Of fainting ?" she asked coldly, chillily.

"I could not help that. No ! Not—not of fainting. I was ashamed of the fainting a few minutes ago. I was not thinking of that now. It was wrong of me to faint, no doubt."

"You could not help it, you know," she said coldly still.

"I could not help it then, but I should have taken precautions against anything of the kind by familiarizing myself with unpleasant and trying sights. No man ought to be a——"

"Woman," she said, finishing the sentence for him with an icy laugh. His want of consideration had exasperated her.

"Yes," he said gravely, "no man ought to be a woman."

"But which is it more like a woman, to faint at a hideous sight or run away from a paltry unpleasantness."

His face grew very dark. He did not answer.

At this moment the four-wheeler he had called drew up. Hanbury opened the door, and handed her in. He was about to follow when she stopped him with a gesture. "It now occurs to me that you had better go back and see that man who was so good to me, and whom you sent for the cab for yourself." Her eyes were flashing angrily now.

"Why ?" he asked with the door in his hand.

"Well, I just recollect that I gave him your name and my own. You had better see him if you want to keep our names out of the papers. Drive on."

CHAPTER IX.

"ONLY A WOMAN."

JOHN HANBURY turned away and began retracing his steps slowly. When he reached Chetwynd Street he looked up and down it anxiously. He saw no appearance of anything unusual, no undue crowd, no hurrying of people ; he heard no loud talk, no excited exclamations.

He had now completely recovered from the effect of the weakness which had seized him a few minutes ago. He stood at the corner, and drew himself up to his full height, with his chin well in, his head back, and a contemptuous look on his face.

He was dark-eyed, dark-skinned, dark-bearded, close upon six feet, good-looking, but not handsome, and yet his face was more attractive than most faces regularly ordered. The whole mask was extremely mobile, and always changing when he spoke, or when the current of his thoughts altered ; a flashing and flitting light seemed to come, not from his eyes only, but from all his face. The eyes were large and restless, or perhaps it would be more correct to say unresting, and when animated they flamed and burned with passion and earnestness. His figure was thick-set for his years, but his height carried off the bulk. He was lithe, active, hardy, and the last man anyone would expect to faint or show physical weakness. Some men who became illustrious surgeons have had to overcome this revulsion from blood, and horror at the sight of it.

He turned to the right and began walking rapidly. A few small groups of people were gathered around the mouth of Welbeck Place, discussing the event of that afternoon. Hanbury looked around. If that man had come back with a cab he must have dismissed it, for no cab was in sight.

For a moment he paused in doubt. He approached one of the little knots of people. "Could you tell me, if you please, where I should be likely to see a low-sized gentleman who carries a heavy stick? I think he belongs to this neighbourhood," said Hanbury to a man standing at

the corner, a very low-looking type of man in a shabby jacket.

"You mean little Mr. Leigh?" said the man.

"I don't know his name. He is a small man, and there is something wrong with his back."

"It's Mr. Leigh you want," said the man. "That's him; 'e's a humpback."

"Yes," said Hanbury, who had waited in vain for an answer to his question. The man in the jacket had forgotten his question. He was in sore want of sixpence, and was wondering how he could come by the money. On principle he had no objection to using honest means, provided they were not laborious. He was not a good specimen of the natives of this part of London.

"Do you know where I should be likely to find him?"

"Where you'd be likely to find 'im? No I don't. If 'e was about 'ere you couldn't see 'im very heasy, 'e's that small, and 'e isn't about hany where, as you can see if you look." The speaker had observed Leigh go into the Hanover five minutes before, and knew he was even now in the private bar. But then he wanted sixpence badly, and saw a chance of making it out of this stranger and his knowledge of Leigh's person, ways and locality.

Hanbury looked around as if about seeking information elsewhere. The man felt the money slipping through his fingers, and hastened to add, "I'm hout of work, I ham, gov'nor, an' I'd be glad of hany job. *You'd* never be hable to find 'im 'ere, but I think I could, if you want me to."

"Very good. If you find out for me where he is I'll give you half-a-crown," said Hanbury, putting his hand in his trouser's pocket.

This was a serious and perplexing matter for the man in the jacket. It would be only right to show a pretence of earning the money, and it would be unsafe to leave the offerer of the reward alone, for he might fall into the hands of sharks, and so the half-crown might get into the pocket of some one not half so deserving as he. "I'm not sure, sir, where 'e is, but if you come with me I'll show you where I think 'e is." He led the way to the door of the Hanover, and pointing to the entrance marked "Private" said: "If you try in there, and if you don't find 'im I'll

go round with you, sir, to all the places 'e's likely to be in, for I'm 'ard set for what you was so kind has to promise me." This was a very excellent way out of his difficulty. It secured the reward in the present, and saved appearances at the expense of a promise which he knew need not be fulfilled.

Hanbury looked in, and seeing Leigh, paid the man in the jacket the money and entered the private bar. The dwarf was there alone. This apartment had few visitors until evening, and all the idle people had been drawn off in the wake of the Negro's litter. Even Williams the landlord had been induced by curiosity to make one of the crowd.

"Hah," said Leigh, when he saw Hanbury come in and shut the door. "You thought better of waiting for that cab. I wasn't very long. I am glad you came back. I hope you are again quite well? Eh?" His words and accent were polite—too polite the young man thought. There was a scornful glitter in the hunchback's eyes. A hugh volume bound in red cloth lay on the polished metal counter beside him. When Hanbury saw the volume his face flushed vividly. The book was the *Post Office Directory*.

"I am quite well again, thank you. I came back on purpose to see you." He drew a high stool towards him and sat down, trying to cover his confusion by the act.

"Greatly honoured, I'm sure," said the other man, with all the outward seeming of sincerity, but with that nasty glitter in the bright deep-sunken eyes.

"No, no," said Hanbury, with emphatic gestures of his arms. "My going off so suddenly must have seemed strange——"

"Oh dear no! Hah! I have often heard of men going off in a dead faint in the same way. I was just trying to make up my mind which of the Hanburys in the *Directory* you were. Let me see," opening the huge book.

"I don't mean my—my illness. That's not what I meant when I said 'going off.' I meant that you must have been surprised at my going away before you came back with the cab. But I was anxious to get away, and

quite confused at the moment, and it was not until the lady with me reminded me of your kindness that I resolved to come back. I am sure I don't know how to thank you sufficiently. Only for you I cannot think how I should have got on. The lady——"

" 'Miss Ashton,' she told me her name was," said Leigh, with a peculiar smile that made the young man flush again. The implication he took of the smile being that she was able to speak when he was senseless.

"Yes," he said with constraint; he could not bring himself to utter her name in such a low place, a common pot-house!

"May I ask you if you are Mr. John Hanbury?"

"That is my name," said he, looking around apprehensively.

"Hah! I thought so. I had the honour of hearing you speak——"

Hanbury again looked round as though in fear of hearing his own name, and interposed: "Please do not. You will add to the great favour you have already done me if you say nothing of that kind. I am most anxious to have a little conversation—private conversation with you—this is no place," again he cast his eyes around him apprehensively. There was no one but the potman, Tom Binns, in the bar, and in the "public department," only the man who had got the half-crown.

"It is the best, the only good place, hereabouts, unless you would condescend to cross my humble threshold and accept the poor hospitality I can offer you." It is difficult to say where the politeness was overdone in the manner, but the overdoing was as conspicuous in the manner as in the words; but again allowance is always made for people of exceptional physical formation. Hanbury could not tell why he disliked this man and shrank from him, but he looked on him as if he were a dangerous wild beast playing at being tame. He did want five minutes' talk with him. It could do no harm to accept his invitation.

He got briskly off the stool, saying: "I shall be delighted to go to your place with you, I am sure."

Leigh led the way in ceremonious silence, and opened the private door in Chetwynd Street, and bowed his guest

in, saying: "I shall have to trouble you to climb two pair of stairs. The poor of earth, we are told, will be rich hereafter. In this life, anyway, they live always nearest to Heaven."

Preceded by Hanbury he mounted to his flat, and ushered his companion into the sitting-room.

"I am only an humble clockmaker, and in my business it is as well to keep an eye on the sun. One cannot guard too carefully against imposture. Pray take a chair. You were pleased to say you wished to speak to me in private. We are alone on this floor. No one can hear us."

Hanbury felt greatly relieved. This was the only man who knew his name. There had not yet been time for him to tell it to any one likely to publish it in the newspapers. He began:

"In the first place I have again to thank you most sincerely for your great services to me a while ago. Believe me, I am very grateful and shall always hold myself your debtor."

"You are too kind. It is a pleasure to do a little service for a gentleman like Mr. Hanbury, the great orator. If only Chetwynd Street knew it had so distinguished a visitor it would be very proud, although the cause in which I heard you speak in Bloomsbury is not very popular in the slums of Westminster. However, you may rest assured the public shall not be allowed to remain in ignorance of the distinction conferred upon our district, this obscure and poor and unworthy corner of Westminster. When you saw me in the Hanover, I was preparing a little paragraph for the papers." The dwarf smiled ambiguously.

Hanbury started and coloured and moved his feet impatiently, uneasily. He could not determine whether the clockmaker was sincere or not in what he had said in the earlier portions of his speech; he was startled by what he said at the end. "Mr. Leigh, you have done me a favour already, a great favour, a great service. They say one is always disposed to help one he has helped before. Do me another service and you will double, you will quadruple, my gratitude. Say nothing to any one of seeing me here, above all let nothing get into the papers about it."

"Hah," said Leigh, throwing himself back on his chair, thrusting his hands down to the bottom of his trousers' pockets and looking out of the window. "Hah! I see! I understand. A woman in the case," in a tone of conviction and severity. He did not remove his eyes from the window.

The colour on Hanbury's face deepened. His eyes flashed. It was intolerable that this low, ill-shapen creature should refer to Dora, to Dora to whom he was engaged, who was to be his wife, as "a woman in the case." Something disgraceful generally attaches to the phrase. Anyway, there was nothing for it but to try to muzzle Leigh. He forced himself to say calmly. "Oh, dear no. Not in the unpleasant sense. The lady who was with me is——"

"Miss Ashton."

"Yes. She told me she gave you her name and mine. Well, Mr. Leigh, you are good enough to say you remember me as a speaker in Bloomsbury. I am seriously thinking of adopting a public career. I could not, for a time at all events, appear on any platform of disputed principles if this unfortunate fainting of mine got into the papers. Some opponent would be certain to throw it in my face. Will you do me the very great favour of keeping the matter to yourself?"

Hanbury was extremely earnest; he leaned forward on his chair and gesticulated energetically. Leigh swiftly turned his face from the window and said: "It can't be done, Mr. Leigh. I suppose you will allow that I, even humble I, may have principles as well as you?"

"Most assuredly, and it would be bad for the community if all public men agreed. Politics would then corrupt from stagnation."

"Well," said the clockmaker, shaking himself into an attitude of resoluteness. "You are a Tory, I am a Radical. Fate has delivered you into my hands, why should I spare you, why should I not spoil you?"

Hanbury winced and wriggled. This was very unlooked-for and very unpleasant. "I may have spoken on a Tory platform but I have never adopted fully the Tory programme——"

"Tory programme. bah! There never was and never

can be such a thing, except it be a programme to cry. 'Hold on.'"

"Well, let me substitute Tory platform for Tory programme; anyway, whatever side I may take, the publication of this affair would cast such ridicule upon me that I should be compelled to keep off any kind of platform for a time."

"You are an extremely able speaker for so young a man. Mr. Hanbury, I am afraid it is my duty to send a paragraph to the papers. A paragraph of that kind always tells. Anything unkind and true invariably amuses our own side and injures the other side and sticks like wax."

Hanbury writhed. "The hideous beast," he thought. He would have liked to throw the little monster through the window. He rose and began walking up and down the room hastily. "Mr. Leigh, if you will not, as a party man, let this unfortunate thing lie still, will you oblige me personally and say nothing about it? If you do I will consider myself under a deep obligation to you." He had an enormously exaggerated idea of the importance of the affair, but so have most men and particularly young men when the affair threatens to cover them with scorn or ridicule.

"A personal favour from me to you. On what grounds do you put the request?"

"On any honourable grounds you please. You said you were not rich——"

"I did not say I was corrupt." His manner was quick, abrupt, final. His face darkened. His eyes glittered. "Mr. Hanbury you are a rich man——"

"Not rich surely."

"You are rich compared with any man in this street. You are a rich man. You got your money without work or risk. You are young and clever and tall and straight and healthy and good-looking and eloquent and dear to the most beautiful lady I ever laid eyes on——"

"Curse him!" thought Hanbury, but he held his peace, remained without movement of limb or feature.

"Rich, good-looking, sound, beloved, eloquent, young. Look at me with the eyes of your mind, and the eyes of your body. Poor, disfavoured, marred and maimed,

loathed, ungifted in speech, middle-aged. Do not stop me. I have no chance if I allow you, a gentleman of your eloquence, to speak against me. Think of it all, and then work out a little calculation for me, and tell me the result. Will you do so candidly, fairly, honestly?"

"Yes, indeed, I will."

"Very well. You who are gifted as I have said, come to me who am afflicted as I have said, and ask me to do you a favour, ask me to sell you a favour. Suppose the favour you ask me to do you cost me ten, at how much do you estimate its value to you?"

"A hundred. Anything you like."

"I am not thinking of money."

"Nor am I. Anything ten-fold returned to you I will freely give."

"Wait a moment. Let me think a while."

Hanbury ceased to walk up and down, and stood in the window leaning against the old-fashioned folding shutters painted the old-fashioned dirty drab.

Leigh sat with his chin sunken deeply on his chest, and his eyes fixed on the floor. Then he spoke in a low tone, a tone half of reverie:

"Nature deals in wonders, and I am one of them. And I in turn deal in wonders, and there are many of them. If I chose I could show you the most wonderful clock in all the world, and I could show you the most wonderful gold in all the world, more wonderful a thousand times than mystery gold. But I will not show you these things now. I will show you a more wonderful thing still. Will you come with me a little way?"

"Yes, but you have not set me that question in arithmetic yet."

"I cannot do so until you have come a little way with me. I want to show you the most wonderful thing you ever saw."

"May I ask what it is?"

"You need not be afraid."

"Why need not I be afraid?"

"Because *you* are not hump-backed and chicken-breasted and lop-sided and dwarfed and hideous."

"But what are you taking me to see?"

"Something more wonderful and more precious than any mystery gold, than my own miracle gold or my clock, and yet of a kind common enough."

"What?"

"A woman."

"But why should I go?"

"Come, and if you ask me that when you have seen, I will ask nothing for my silence."

"Only a woman?"

"Only a woman."

They descended the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

LEIGH PROMISES ONE VISIT AND PAYS ANOTHER.

THAT morning when Edith Grace fell asleep in the corner of the third-class carriage, on her way from Millway to London, she sank into the most profound unconsciousness. No memory of life disturbed her repose. No dreams intruded. The forward movement of the train was unheeded. The vibration did not break in upon her serenity. At the various stations where the train stopped people got in or out, the door banged, men and women talked to one another, the engine shrieked, and still Edith not only slept, but slept as peacefully and free from vision or fear as though all were silent and at rest. Before closing her eyes she took fully into her mind the friendly porter's assurance there would be no need to change her carriage between Millway and the end of her journey.

When she opened her eyes they had arrived at Grosvenor Road, where tickets are taken up for Victoria. She was conscious of being shaken by the shoulder; she awoke and saw opposite her a stout, kind-faced country-woman, with a basket on her arm. The woman said: "This is Grosvenor Road. We are just at Victoria. They want your ticket."

Two other women were in the carriage—no man. A ticket-collector standing at the door, impatient of delay, was flicking the tickets in his hand.

She started and coloured, and sat upright with all haste and began searching quickly, anxiously, despairingly. Her memory up to the moment of giving the money to the friendly porter was perfect. After that all was dim until all became blank in sleep. She could not clearly recollect the man's giving her the ticket. She remembered a dull sensation in her hand, as though she had felt him thrust the ticket into it, and she remembered a still duller sensation of peace and ease, as though she believed all was right till her journey's end. Then came complete oblivion. She was now burning with confusion and dismay.

"Ticket, please, the train is waiting."

"I—I can't find my ticket."

"Pray, try. The train is waiting."

"I cannot find it."

The collector said nothing, but made a sign, and entered the compartment. The train moved on. "Try your pockets well, miss," said the collector civilly; "you are sure to find the ticket. You had one, of course?"

She tried her pocket and stood up and looked around her. Misfortunes came thick upon her. She had but just escaped from Eltham House, had thrown up her situation, had been wandering about the country all the morning, and now was back in London without a ticket or a sixpenny piece! People were sent to prison for travelling without a railway ticket. She had slept nothing last night, was she to spend this night in gaol? She sat down in despair.

"Indeed, I cannot find it." She was white now, and the trembling with which she had been seized on finding her loss had gone. She was pale, cold, hopeless, indifferent.

"Where did you come from?"

"Millway. I got in at Millway. The porter said he would get my ticket for me. I gave him all the money I had, only enough for the ticket, and——"

"Did he give you the ticket?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Don't know whether he gave you the ticket or not?" The collector's manner, which had been sympathetic and encouraging, hardened into suspiciousness.

"I do not know. I fell asleep in the carriage, and did not wake until just now. What shall I do?"

"You will have to pay your fare from Millway."

"But I can't. I told you I haven't any money. I gave it all to the porter."

"If you haven't a ticket and can't pay it will be a bad job. Is it likely any friend of yours will be waiting for you at the station?"

"Oh, no! I am coming up quite unexpectedly."

"It's a bad job, then," said the collector.

"But you will let me go home? You will not keep me here? You will not detain me?" she asked piteously. Her indifference was passing away and she was becoming excited at hideous possibilities conjured up by her imagination while the train glided slowly into the terminus.

"I don't know. We must see what the Inspector says."

The train had stopped and the two other women got out, the one who had spoken to her saying: "I hope it will be all right, my dear. You don't look as if you was up to anything bad. You don't look like one of them swindling girls that they sent to prison for a fortnight last week."

"Oh, my God!" cried Edith piteously, as she stepped out on the platform. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

She was one of the last passengers to leave the train and the shallow fringe of alighting passengers had thinned and almost cleared away. She felt completely overwhelmed, as if she should die. She caught with one hand the side of the open carriage door for support, and kept the other hand before her face. She ceased to sob, or cry or weep. The collector and two guards were standing round her, waiting until she should recover herself. Presently a fourth man came up slowly from the further end of the train and stood among the three men.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly of one of the guards. "Has anything happened to the lady? Is she ill?"

A shiver went through Edith. There was something familiar in the voice, but unfamiliar in the tone.

"Lost her ticket and hasn't got any money. We have sent for the Inspector," answered the collector.

"Pooh, money," said the new-comer contemptuously.

"I have money. Where has the lady come from? How much is the fare?"

"Come from Millway," answered the collector.

"Millway! So have I, What class? First?"

"No; Third. Five and twopence."

"Here you are." The new-comer held out his hand to the collector with money in it.

"This gentleman offers to pay, miss," said the collector turning to Edith. "Am I to take the money?"

The girl swayed to and fro, and did not answer. It was plain she had heard what had been said. Her movement was an acknowledgment she had heard. She did not answer because she did not know what to say. Two powerful emotions were conflicting in her. The feeling of weakness was passing away. She was trying to choose between gaol (for so the matter seemed to her) and deliverance at *his* hands.

"Of course, the lady will allow me to arrange this little matter for her. She can pay me back at any time. I will give her my name and address: Oscar Leigh, Forbes's bakery, Chetwynd Street."

"Am I to take the money, miss? We are losing time. The train is going to back out. Here's the Inspector. Am I to take the five and twopence from this gentleman?"

"Yes," she whispered. She loosed her hold upon the carriage door, but did not take down her hand from her face.

The collector wrote out and thrust a ticket into her disengaged hand. The touch of the hand recalled the dim memory of what had happened earlier that day. Her fingers closed firmly, instinctively, on the paper.

"Now, miss, it's all right. Please stand away. The train is backing out."

She dropped her hand from her face, moved a pace from the edge of the platform and looked round. She knew she should see him with her eyes, she had heard him with her ears. She shrank from the sight of him, she shrank still more from the acknowledgment she should have to make.

Leigh was standing in front of her, leaning on his stick and gazing intently at her. With a cry of astonishment he let his stick fall and threw up his arms. "Miss Grace!

Miss Grace, as I am alive ! Miss Grace here ! Miss Grace here now !”

He dropped his arms. His cry and manner bereft her of the power of speech. She felt abashed and confounded. She seemed to have treated badly this man who had just delivered her from a serious and humiliating difficulty.

“Pray excuse me,” he said, bowing low and raising his hat as he picked up his stick. “The sight of you astonished me out of myself. I thought you were miles and miles away. I thought you were at Eltham House. To what great misfortune does my poor mother owe your absence. You are not—please say you are not ill?”

“I am not ill.” It was very awkward that he should speak of his mother’s loss, of her abandoning his mother. She had felt a liking in their short acquaintance for the poor helpless old woman. She had come away without saying a word to Mrs. Leigh. True, she had left a note, and as she was quitting the place that morning the note had not been where she had placed it. Perhaps it had merely been blown down or knocked away by the wind or by herself, or by him in the dark. She was conscience-stricken at having deserted Mrs. Leigh, she was bewildered at the inconsistency of his words now, and his visit to that room from which he believed she had fled last night. She had, too, overheard him say to his mother that he would put something right in Eltham for her this day. She had gathered he had had no intention of leaving Eltham until about noon, and it was not nine o’clock yet ! He surely did not know she was in that dark room when he made the soliloquy. To suppose he thought she was there would be madness. He knew at that time she had left the house with the intention of not returning and he believed she had not returned. How then could he imagine she was still at Eltham ? Why had he left Millway so early ? Ah, yes, of course, as far as that went, Mrs. Brown must have discovered her flight on missing the key of the gate from its hook in the little hall of the gate-house. She must have given information and he must have come up by this train, but why ? Ah, the whole thing was horribly confused, and dull, and dim, and she heard a buzzing in her ears.

All this went through her mind as quickly as wind through

a tree, and like wind through a tree touching and moving the many boughs and branches of thought in her mind simultaneously.

Leigh, upon hearing her say "I am not ill," drew back with a gesture of astonishment and protest, and said, "You were not ill, and yet you fled from us, Miss Grace! Then we must have been so unfortunate as to displease Miss Grace unwittingly. But you are tired, child, and I am inconsiderate to keep you waiting. You are going where?" His voice became suave and gracious. His manner showed to advantage contrasted with his half sly and wholly persistent manner of yesterday.

"I was going home to Grimsby Street."

"Then this is our way. You have no baggage, I presume?"

"No, I left it behind me. I also left a note——"

"Hah! Here we are. Now Miss Grace, you must be far too tired and put out by your early journey and this most unpleasant experience on the platform to be allowed by me to speak a word of explanation. Pray step in. I shall call to enquire how you are later in the day."

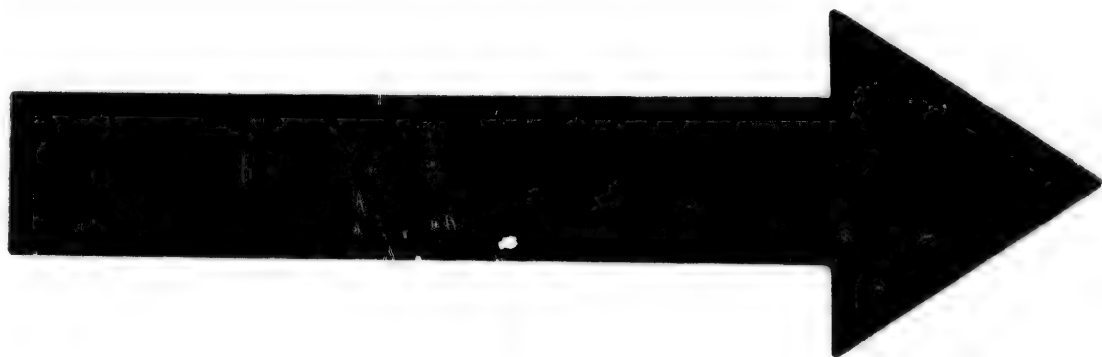
He hurried her into a four-wheeler and gave the driver his fare and the address before she had time to hesitate or protest. Then he turned briskly away, and leaving the terminus, clambered to the top of an omnibus going east.

When he arrived at the Bank he descended. He looked sharply round, and after scrutinizing the faces of all those standing or moving slowly near him, walked rapidly a few hundred yards back over the way the omnibus had come, along clattering and roaring Cheapside. Then he pulled up suddenly, and cast quick, furtive glances at the men on either side, particularly those who were standing, and those moving slowly.

It was certain Oscar Leigh was trying to find out if he was watched.

"Hah!" cried he under his breath. "No one. All right."

He then turned into one of the narrow streets leading south of the main thoroughfare and walked rapidly. Here were large, slow-moving vans and carts and drays in the roadway and a thin stream of men, with now and then a woman of homely aspect and dingy garments, hurrying by. As one





walked it was quite possible to take note of every person and no one escaped the dark flashing eyes of Leigh. In the eyes of City men when they walk about through the mazes of their own narrow domain there is always an introspective look. They are not concerned with the sticks and stones or the people they encounter. They know every stick and stone by rote and they are not abroad to meet people in the street, but to call upon people in warehouses, shops, or offices. Their eyes are turned inward, for their minds are busy. As they step swiftly forward they are devising, inventing, calculating, plotting, planning. They are on their way from one place to another and all the things they pass by are to them indifferent. They have the air of sleep-walkers who have only their bournes in their minds and are heedless of all things encountered by the way.

Oscar Leigh was the very opposite to the denizens of the City. His whole attention was given to his environment. He kept on the left-hand pavement and close to the houses so that he could see all before him without turning his head. Thus he obviated any marked appearance of watchfulness.

When he came to a cross street he stood still, looked back and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He waited a minute and then, muttering again a satisfied "Hah! No one," struck into the cross street by the left and proceeded very slowly. This was a still narrower artery than the former one. When he reached the end of it he paused once more, and stood regarding the ground he had just covered. It was plain that by this time all anxiety had been removed from his mind.

He faced about, threading his way through alleys of great secrecy and gloom and silence, and moved in a south-easterly direction until he emerged at the head of London Bridge.

He crossed the river on foot, and keeping to the right through mean streets out of Borough High Street found himself in London Road, where from noon to midnight, all the year round, a market for the poor is held on the pavement and in the kennel.

He crossed this street and entered another, Tunbridge Street, the dirtiest and dingiest one he had yet traversed. It seemed given up wholly to vehicles out of work. Here were a couple of dozen large, unhandsome, stores, warehouses

and small factories, and half-a-dozen of very poor houses, let in tenements. An ill-smelling, close, foul, low-lying, little-used street.

The ground floor of one of the houses was devoted to commerce. The floor, as far in as one could see, was littered with all kinds of odds and ends of metal machines and utensils and implements. On a washed-out blue fascia-board, in washed-out white letters, over the door, were the words "John Timmons," in large letters, and beneath in small letters, once black and now a streaky grey, "marine store dealer." Into the misty twilight of this house of bankrupt and forgeless Vulcan Leigh disappeared. Any one passing down Tunbridge Street a quarter of a minute after he stepped across the threshold would not have been able to detect any living being in the business establishment of Mr. John Timmons, marine store dealer.

But if a listener had been at the back of the store, behind the boiler of a donkey-engine, or leant over the head of the dark cellar in the left corner, he would have heard the following dialogue carried on by careful whispers in the darkness below :

"Yes. I have come back sooner than I expected. I went to Birmingham yesterday morning to consult a very clever mechanist there about the new movement for the figures of time in my clock—Hah !"

"You told me you were going away, but I thought it was to Edinburgh."

"Hah !" said the former speaker, "I changed my mind about Edinburgh and went to Birmingham instead. I thought when I was speaking to you last that Edinburgh would be best, but I got the name of the best man in Birmingham and went to him instead. My friend in Birmingham not only put me right about the new movement, but when I told him I thought I was on the point of perfecting my discovery of the combination in metals he told me he would be able to find a market for me if I was sure the new compound was equal to representation. Of course, I told him the supply would be limited until I could arrange for a proper laboratory and for help. I explained that no patent could protect all the processes of manufacture and that for the present the method must be a profound secret. I

also told him I proposed calling my invention Miracle Gold."

"No doubt about no patent being sufficient to protect. You were right enough there. Ho-ho-ho-ho."

"It was best to say that. Anyway, he is ready to take any quantity, if the thing is equal to representation."

"There's no doubt it will be. Ho-ho-ho-ho."

"I told him my great difficulty at present, was the colour—that it was very white—too like Australian gold—too much silver."

"Ho-ho-ho-ho, that was clever, very clever. You are the cleverest man I ever met, Mr. —."

"Hah—stop. Isn't it best not to mention names here?"

"Well, it's always best to be on the safe side and even walls can't tell what they don't hear, can they?"

"I told him also that for the present the quantity would be small of the miracle gold, but that I hoped soon to increase the supply as soon as I got fully to work."

"That's true."

"He says he will take all I can make, no matter how much, if it is equal to representation——"

"Ho-ho-ho-ho! Equal to representation! That's splendid. I can't help laughing at that."

"No. It was clever of me. But the affair is hardly a laughing matter. May I beg of you not to laugh in that way again? I daresay the most uncomfortable place after a prison into which anyone goes is a grave, and this place looks and smells like a grave. Besides, there is fearful danger in this affair, fearful danger. Pray don't laugh."

"But you will go on with the thing now?"

"Yes, I will go on with it. But, observe, I cannot increase my risk by a grain weight. I am already risking too much. I deal, mind you, with nothing but the alloy."

"I don't want you to deal with anything else. You know nothing of the matter beyond the alloy. What did the Birmingham gentleman say the stuff would be worth?"

"In the pure metal state?"

"Of course. After you are done with it?"

"Hah! He will not say until he has a specimen. When can you have some ready?"

"Now. This minute. Will you take it away with you?"

"No, not now. What are you doing to-night?"

"Nothing particular."

"Can you come to my place between twelve and half past?"

"Certainly."

"Without fail?"

"I'll be there to the minute you say."

"Very well. Let it be twelve exactly. I have a most excellent reason of my own for punctuality. Bring some of the alloy with you. Knock at the door once, one knock, the door in Chetwynd Street, mind. I'll open the door for you myself. Mind, not a word to a soul, and above all don't go into the Hanover hard by. I have reasons for this—most important reasons."

"Do not fear. I shall be there punctually at twelve. I never go into public houses. I can't afford it. They are places for only talking and drinking and I can't afford either. Are you going?"

"Yes. I must run away now. The National Gallery folk are in a fog about a Zuccaro. They are not certain whether it is genuine or not. There is a break in the pedigree and they will do nothing until I have seen the picture and pronounced upon it. Good-bye. Twelve sharp."

"Good-bye. I'll not keep you waiting for me to-night."

Oscar Leigh came quickly out into Tunbridge Street and thence into London Road, and got on the top of an omnibus going north. He changed to the top of one going west when he reached Ludgate Circus.

If you have sharp eyes, and want to see with them that you are not followed, the top of an omnibus is an excellent way of getting about through London.

Leigh alighted from the second omnibus at Charing Cross, and walked from that straight to the Hanover in Chetwynd Street. The nation was not that day made richer by his opinion of the genuineness of the alleged Zuccaro, nor had he up to this moment conceived the advisability of inventing the mummified Egyptian prince, much less of buying his highness, with a view to painting the dial of his clock with the asphaltum from the coffin.

He had spent the time between his arrival at Victoria

and his brandy and soda with Williams at the Hanover in going to and coming back from Tunbridge Street, and in his visit to John Timmons, marine store dealer.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGER THAN MIRACLE GOLD.

GRIMSBY Street, where Mrs. Grace, Edith's grandmother, had lodgings, to which Edith Grace had been driven that morning from Victoria, is one of the humble, dull, dingy, thoroughfares formed of small private houses in Chelsea. The ground here is very low and very flat. The houses have all half-sunken basements, bow windows on the first floor and two floors above. They are all painted of the same light, washed-out drab. They all have light drab venetian blinds. All have tiny areas paved with light drab flags; all three steps rising six or eight inches each from the front gate to the front door. All have six steps descending from the flagged passage to the dark drab, blistered low house-door under the steps. The aspect of dull, respectable mediocrity of the whole monotonous street is heart-breaking. The sun, even of this cloudless June day, did not brighten it. The sun cannot make washed-out drab look pleasant. From end to end is not a tree or shrub or creeper, not even a single red brick to break the depressing uniformity; the chimney pots are painted drab too. The area-railings are all black. All the doors are the colour of unpolished oak. The knockers flat and shapeless and bulged with blistered paint.

Mrs. Grace lived at Number 28, half-way down the street. She rented the first floor unfurnished. She had lost some money in the disaster which swallowed up her grand-daughter's little all. The utmost economy now became necessary for the old woman, and she had resolved to give up the tiny room until now Edith's.

Mrs. Grace was a tall, well-made woman, of seventy years, very upright and youthful in manner for one of her years. She was of quick nature, and looked upon all

matters from an extremely optimist or pessimist point of view. This disposition had little or no effect upon her spirits. It afforded her as much satisfaction to consider the direct, as the pleasantest, results. She was uniformly good-natured, and always saw the hand of beneficent Providence in calamity.

That Thursday morning when Edith alighted from the cab, Mrs. Grace was sitting in her front room window looking out at the placid, drab street. With an exclamation of surprise and dismay she ran down stairs, let the girl in, embraced and kissed her vehemently, crying, "My darling! my darling child! What has happened? Is there no such place at all as Eltham House, or has it been burned down?"

Edith burst into tears. She was not given to weeping, but the relief at finding herself at home, after the anxiety and adventures through which she had gone, broke her down, and, with her arm round the old woman's waist, she led Mrs. Grace upstairs to the sitting-room.

"Sit down, dear. Sit down and have your cry out. Take off your hat and rest yourself. Have you had your breakfast? Did you find Mrs. Leigh dead? or has there been a railway accident? Have your cry out. I am sorry I ever let you away from my sight. You are not hurt, are you? Where is your luggage? I declare that cabman has driven off with it. I must get someone to run after him. Did you take his number?"

"No, mother." Edith called her grandmother simply mother. It was shorter than grandmother, and more respectful than granny. "I have no luggage with me. I left it at Eltham House. No accident has happened. Simply I did not like the place. I could not stop there. I felt strange and lonely and afraid, and I came back. I ran away."

"And quite right too, dear. I am very, very sorry I ever let you go away from me. I am sure I do not know how I have got on since you left me. I thought of telegraphing you to come back. But it's all right now that you are here again, and I shall take good care you do not go off from me any more until some fairy prince comes for my child. We shall be able to live some way together, dear. With a little

economy we need not be separated. Your room is just as you left it; nothing stirred. I hadn't the courage to go into it. Go into your own room, pet, and take off your things." She took Edith by the hand and led her to the little room which had been hers so long, and which seemed so secure after that large chamber in which she had spent so many minutes of anxiety and fear at Eltham House.

Then, in few words, she told all to the old woman, omitting the visit of Leigh to the room when he believed her to be gone. She explained her flight by saying this Mr. Leigh had wearied her with attentions. She said nothing about his having asked her to let him kiss her patriarchally. She wound up by declaring she could not endure him and his objectionable devotion, and that she had come away by the first train, having left a note to say the place did not suit her, and that her luggage was to be sent after her. Then she told of the loss of her ticket and Mr. Leigh's opportune appearance, and last of all, of his promise or threat of calling.

The story, as it met the ears of Mrs. Grace, did not show Leigh in a very offensive light. No doubt he had been at Eltham House when Edith arrived, and that gave the girl an unpleasant shock, for which she was not prepared, and which coloured all her subsequent thoughts of him. She had been a little put out, or offended, or frightened. She had gone to her room, locked the door and slipped away back to London next morning. That was all, and the old woman made much of getting the girl home again, and dwelt little on the reason of her flight. She put down the cause of flight to an over-sensitive young girl confronted for the first time with vulgar admiration and the cold world beyond home.

Edith confessed to have eaten no breakfast, and slept nothing during the night, so Mrs. Grace insisted upon her taking food, and lying down awhile in her room. Then she came away, shutting the door softly behind her, and sat in the window-place of the sitting-room to think over the affair.

Thought with Mrs. Grace was never logical or consequential, and at the present moment the delight of regaining Edith coloured her ideas with pleasant hues. It had been

soresly against her grain she allowed the girl to go from her at all. Nothing but her grand-daughter's emphatic wish would have brought her to consent to it. Before they lost their money they had had enough for modest luxury in these cheap lodgings. All Edith's money had been engulfed, and some of her own. There was still enough for the existence of two. Edith was not fit for the world, and this experience afforded convincing evidence that no other experiment of the kind should be tried.

When the little man, Leigh, had come to arrange about Edith, she looked on him with scant favour. He was about to take the child from her. He had told Edith he would call later to-day to ask how she had got on. She should receive him with pleasure. No doubt he had persecuted Edith a little, and the girl had been put out and frightened. But was not this very persecution the means of driving Edith back to her home? And were not his attentions not only a proof, if proofs were needed, of the girl's beauty, but also of the unadvisability of letting her stray from her side? That argument would be conclusive with Edith when they talked the matter over quietly. If a man of this man's appearance had, under the potent spell of her beauty, so far forgotten himself as to offer her marked attentions, how much more persistent and emphatic would be the homage drawn towards her from other men. Her good looks had turned the head of this Leigh until he forgot his deformities. Could she expect other men, men of fair proportions, would be more insensible or less persistent?

Mrs. Grace did not believe Edith had any insuperable objection to marriage, or the notion of a suitor. But she knew the girl's pride of family would prevent her ever attorning to the attentions of an admirer who was not a gentleman. The Graces of Gracedieu, in Derbyshire, had come over with the Norman William, and although her own husband had been only the poor cadet of that house, and her son, Edith's father, a lawyer, who died young, leaving little for his widow and orphan, Edith was as proud of her lineage as though through her veins ran "all the blood of all the Howards." Indeed Edith had somewhat strained and fantastic theories of family and breeding and blood. She had always impressed upon Edith that she was

a lady by birth and breeding. Edith was disposed to assume that she was a duchess by descent. There was no haughtiness or arrogance in her grand-daughter; the girl was extremely simple, and gentle, and good-natured; but she kept aloof from the people around her, not out of disdain, but because of the feeling that she was not of them, that they would not understand her or she them, and that they by her presence would only be made unhappy in reflecting on their own humble origin.

When Edith first declared her resolution of earning her own bread, and going out as a governess or companion, Mrs. Grace had made sure this pride of family or birth would successfully bar the way to any bargain, and when the bargain was struck with Mr. Leigh, she felt confident the arrangement would not last long. The end had come sooner than she had dared to hope, and she was delighted. She was thankful to Leigh for being the cause of Edith's failure to rest from home.

Another aspect of the affair was that Edith had come away from Eltham House suddenly, without leave, and without notice. This Mr. Leigh was to call. If he chose to be disagreeable he might urge that breach of contract and something unpleasant might arise from Edith's hasty act. The best thing to do was to see the man when he came, and be polite to him. If he had been a little impudent, over attentive, that was not a very great fault, and all chance of repetition was past. He had been most useful to Edith that morning when she found she had no ticket. Of course, she should pay him the money back—that is, if she had it in the house, which she doubted—and, of course, she should thank him for his goodness to her darling daughter. No duties could be plainer than these. Edith too must apologise for her flight, and thank Mr. Leigh for his kindness to her this morning. That was obviously necessary, and then all the unpleasantness would be as though it had never taken place.

Off and on Mrs. Grace sat at the window until afternoon. At one o'clock she ate a light luncheon; having by a visit to Edith's room found that the girl slept, she let her sleep on. In health, after fatigue and excitement, no one should be waked for food. When the old woman had finished her

meal, and the table was cleared by the landlady's daughter who attended upon the lodgers, Mrs. Grace took her work and resumed her place by the window.

Time slipped away, and she began to think that after all Mr. Leigh might not come, when, lifting her eyes from her work, she saw two men cross the road and approach the house. One of these was the dwarf, the other a complete stranger to her, a tall, powerful-looking young man in a frock-coat and low crowned hat. The two seemed in earnest discourse. Neither looked up. The younger man leant over the elder as if listening intently. They disappeared from view and Mrs. Grace heard them ascend the steps and knock. She hastened to Edith, whom she found just awake and told her Mr. Leigh had arrived. Then she went back to the sitting-room and, when word came up that Mr. Leigh and a friend wished to see her, sent down an invitation for the gentlemen to come up. The two were shown in.

"I do myself, Mrs. Grace, the great pleasure and honour of calling upon you to enquire after Miss Grace, and I have taken the liberty of asking my friend to keep me company," said the little man, bowing profoundly and sweeping the ground with his hat. His tones were most respectful, his manner intensely ceremonious.

Mrs. Grace, waving her hand to a couple of chairs, said : "I am glad to see you and your friend, Mr. Leigh. Will you, please, be seated."

"Mrs. Leigh, my friend, Mr. John Hanbury, whose fame as a public speaker is as wide as the ground covered by the English language."

"Very happy, indeed, to make Mr. Hanbury's acquaintance, and very much honoured by Mr. Hanbury's call," said the old lady bowing again, and then sitting down with another gesture towards the chairs.

The two men sat down. Hanbury felt uncomfortable at Leigh's bombastic introduction, but at the moment he was completely powerless. He felt indignant at this man calling him a friend, but Leigh had it in his power to make him seem ridiculous over a good part of London; there was nothing for this but to grin and bear it.

"Mr. Hanbury and I happening to have business this

way, and I remembering my promise to call and enquire how Miss Grace is after her journey this morning, I thought I'd presume on your kindness and bring him with me."

Mrs. Grace said no apology was necessary, that she was glad Mr. Leigh had brought his friend.

Hanbury winced again. What had this man brought him here for? What was the meaning of his hocus-pocus talk about miracle gold. Was this poor fellow as misshapen in mind as in body? Who was this old woman? Could she be the woman he had spoken of? Nonsense. She was a lady, no doubt, not the kind of woman you would expect to find in such a street of Chelsea, but what then? What of her?

"I hope Miss Grace has taken no harm of her fright?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Leigh. I am sure I don't know what she would have done only for your opportune appearance on the scene. Here she is to thank you in person."

The two men rose.

The door opened and Edith Grace, pale and impassive, entered the room.

Hanbury made a step forward, and cried, "Dora!"

The little man laid his hand on the young man's arm and held him back.

Hanbury looked down at the dwarf in anger and glanced quickly at the girl.

"My grand-daughter, Miss Grace—Mr. John Hanbury, whose speeches I have often asked you to read for me, Edith."

Hanbury fell back a pace and bowed mechanically like one in a dream. He looked from the dwarf to the girl and from the girl to the dwarf, but could find no word to say, had no desire to say a word. He was completely overcome by amazement. The presence of five thousand people, with eyes fixed in expectation upon him, would have acted as a powerful stimulant to composed exaltation, but the presence of this one girl half stunned him.

He was dimly conscious of sitting down and hearing a long explanation about trains and disinclination to leave home and regrets, and cabs, but nothing of it conveyed a clear idea to his mind. He gathered vaguely that this girl,

who was one of the Graces of Gracedieu in Derbyshire, had arrived in London that morning without ticket or money, and the dwarf happened providentially to be in the same train and paid the fare for her.

What he heard left little or no impression upon him except when she spoke. All his attention was fixed in wondering regard upon her face and form.

It was not until Leigh and he were in the street once more that he recovered from the shock and surprise.

"That is the most marvellous thing I ever saw in all my life," said he, as the two walked away.

"Yes," said Leigh, "the most marvellous."

"I can scarcely believe it even yet," said Hanbury in a tone of reverie.

"When you fainted in Welbeck Place," began the dwarf with great emphasis and deliberation.

"Ay," said Hanbury with a start and in a voice of sharp and painful wakefulness. For a while he had forgotten why he had so uncouth a companion.

"When you fainted in Welbeck Place," repeated Leigh coldly, steadily, "I went over to where you were lying, took off my hat to your young lady——"

"Eh?" interrupted Hanbury, with a grimace. "Great Heavens," he thought, "is Dora Ashton, grand-daughter of Lord Byngfield, to be called 'my young lady' by this creature? Why doesn't he call her my young woman, at once? Ugh!"

"I was saying when you interrupted me," said Leigh sternly (it was plain to Hanbury this man was not going to overlook any point of advantage in his position) "that when you were lying in a dead faint in Welbeck Place, and I went to offer help, I took off my hat to your young lady and said, 'Miss Grace, can I be of any use?' or words to that effect."

"I do not wonder." He forgot for a moment his annoyance and disgust. "It is the most astonishing likeness I ever saw in all my life. It may be possible to detect a difference between the two when they are side by side, but I could not tell one from the other when apart."

"Hah! You could not tell one from the other. I could not when I first saw your young lady——"

"May I ask you to say Miss Ashton, or if you would still further oblige me, not to speak of the lady at all."

"Oh-ho! That's the sort of thing it is, is it? Hah! Sly dog! Knowing shaver! Hot'un!"

Hanbury's face blazed, and for a moment he seemed about to forget himself, turn on the dwarf and rend him. Making a powerful effort he controlled his rage. "You are disastrously wrong, and you give me great pain."

"Very good. I'll do you a favour and take your word for it. Hah!"

This insolence was intolerable, and yet—and yet—and—yet it must be borne with for a while.

"I was saying, when you interrupted me a second time, that I could not tell the difference between the two, when I saw Miss Ashton this afternoon. *Now* I could."

"Indeed?" said Hanbury, with frigid politeness. At first this wretched creature had been all silky fur and purring sounds; now he seemed all claws and hisses.

"Yes. Miss Ashton has more go, more vitality, more vigour, more *verve*, more enterprise, more enthusiasm, more divinity."

Hanbury turned round and gazed at the hunchback with astonishment. There was the hurry of eloquence in his words, and the flash of enthusiasm in his eyes. This man was not an ordinary man, physically or intellectually. Hanbury instantly altered his mental attitude towards the dwarf. He no longer assumed the pose of a superior, the method of a master. He recognised an equal. As Leigh had named the qualities of Dora, one by one, Hanbury had felt that thrill which always goes through a man of eloquent emotions when listening to felicitous description. In the judicious and intelligent use of a term there is freemasonry among intellectual men. It is by the phrase, and not the thought, that an intellectual man recognises a fellow. Thought is common, amorphous; with words the intellectual man models it into forms of beauty.

"I do not understand you," said Hanbury. "How do you connect vigour and divinity? The great gods did nothing."

"Ay, the great gods of the Greeks did nothing. But

here in the North our gods are hard-working. You, I know, are a Tory."

"Well, it is somewhat doubtful what I am."

"I am for the people."

"So am I."

"But we differ *in toto* as to the means by which the people may be helped."

"Yes, *in toto*."

"Now then, here is the position: You are a Tory and I am a Radical."

"I do not call myself a Tory. Indeed, I came into this neighbourhood to-day in the democratic interest, if I may put it in that way. But shall we get anything out of a political discussion?"

"I daresay not."

"Then shall we say good-bye to one another here? I may rely on your keeping this whole affair quiet?"

"But you have not heard my request yet. I told you I could show you something more wonderful than mystery gold. I told you I could show you a more wonderful thing than even miracle gold. I have shown that to you. Now I want my hush money."

"What is it?"

"An introduction to Miss Ashton."

"An introduction to Miss Ashton!"

"Yes. Ah, look! That is the first poster of an evening paper I have seen to-day. How dull the evening papers are, to be sure."

"When do you wish to meet Miss Ashton?"

"Now. There never was any time past or future as good as the present."

"Come with me."

CHAPTER XII.

AN OMEN.

HANBURY turned west and led the way. He smiled grimly but said nothing. Here was poetic justice for Dora with a

vengeance. Here was Nemesis in the person of this misshapen representative of the people. Here was a bridegroom of Democracy from a Chelsea slum. She had been anxious to see the people of the slums and now one of the people was anxious to see her. Poetic justice was fully vindicated or would be when he introduced this stunted demagogue to the daughter of a hundred earls.

For a while Leigh said nothing, so that Hanbury had ample time for thought.

Two years ago he had made his first appearance on a platform as a Tory Democrat. His own birth and surroundings had been of neither the very high nor the very low. His father, years dead, William Hanbury, had been a merchant in Fenchurch Street, his mother, still living, was daughter of the late Sir Ralph Preston, Baronet, and brother of the present General Sir Edward Preston. John Hanbury did not know much about his father's family. For two or three generations the Hanburys had lived as private gentlemen of modest means, until some whim took his father, and he went into business in Fenchurch Street and made money. John was the only child, and had a couple of thousand a year of his own, and the reversion of his mother's money. He was thus well off for a young man, and quite independent. He had money enough to adopt any career or pursue none.

Up to a couple of years ago he had been roving in taste. Then he made a few speeches from Tory Democratic platforms and people said he was a born orator, and born orators, by perversion of thought, are supposed to be born statesmen as well. Hence he had made up his mind to devote himself to politics. But up to this time he had few strong political views and no political faith.

He seemed to be about growing into a philosophical politician, that is, a politician useful at times to each party and abhorred by both.

In feeling and tastes John Hanbury was an aristocrat. Although his father had been in business he had never sunk to the level of a City man, whose past and present was all of the City. William Hanbury had been known before his migration into the regions of commerce, and William Hanbury's wife was a baronet's daughter, and no

baronet of yesterday either, and John Hanbury had had two grandfathers who did not work, and furthermore the money which William Hanbury put into business had not, as far as could be traced, come out of business.

It was about a year after John Hanbury made his first platform speech that he became very friendly with the Ashtons. He had known Dora's father for a little while as a member of a non-political West End club. When Mr. Ashton saw that the young man had been haranguing from a platform he took him in hand one day at luncheon at the club and pointed out that meddling in politics meant suicide to happiness. "Both my wife and my daughter are violent politicians; but I will encourage no politics while I am at home. A man's house is to cover and shield him from the storms of the elements, and the storms of parties, and I will have no wrangle under the house tree. I don't want to say anything against politicians, but I don't want to have anything to do with them."

"And what side do Mrs. Ashton and Miss Ashton hold with?"

"The wrong side, of course, sir; they are women. Let us say no more of them. I do not know what their side is called by the charlatans and jugglers of to-day. I hear a jargon going on often when it is fancied I am not attending to what is being said. With everything I hear I adopt a good and completely impartial plan. I alter all the epithets before the nouns to their direct opposite. This, sir, creates as great a turmoil and confusion in my own head as though I were an active politician; but, sir, I save my feelings and retain my self-respect by giving no heed, taking no interest, saying no word. When a man adopts politics he takes a shrew, an infernal shrew, sir, for a wife."

The Honourable Mrs. Ashton (she was daughter of Lord Byngfield) saw the summarised report of Hanbury's speech and immediately took an intense interest in the young man. From the printed reports and the verbal accounts she got of him she conceived a high expectation of the future before him, if he were taken in hand at once, for, alas! was he not on the wrong path?

Accordingly she made up her mind to lie in wait for

him and catch him and convert him or rather divert him, for as yet he was not fully committed to any party. She met him in the drawing-room of a friend. She invited him to her small old house in Curzon Street, and when he came set about the important work of conversion or diversion.

Mrs. Ashton was a tall, thin woman of forty-five with very great vitality and energy. How so frail and slender a body sufficed to restrain so fiery and irrepressible a spirit was a puzzle. It seemed as though the working of the spirit would shake the poor body to pieces. It was impossible to be long near her without catching some of her enthusiasm, and at first John Hanbury, being a young man and quite unused to female propagandists, was almost carried away. But in time he recovered his breath and found himself firm on his feet and at leisure to look around him.

Then he saw Miss Ashton, Dora Ashton, and she was another affair altogether, and affected him differently. He fell in love with Dora. She certainly was the loveliest and most sprightly girl whose hand his hand had ever touched. Notwithstanding the fiery earnestness of her mother, and the statement of her father that his wife and daughter were politicians, she was no politician in a party sense. She was an advocate of progress and the poor, subjects which all parties profess to have at heart, but prominence to which justly or unjustly gives a decidedly Liberal it not Radical tinge to the banner carried by their advocates.

In time Dora began to show no objection to the company of John Hanbury and later the two became informally engaged. They were both opposed to affording the world food for gossip and they agreed to say nothing of their engagement until a very short time before their marriage. They understood one another. That was enough for them. It was certain neither family would object. No question of money was likely to arise. In fact true love would run as smooth as the Serpentine. A little savour of romance and difficulty was imported by a wholly unnecessary secrecy.

John Hanbury had not yet made any distinct profession of political faith. Dora said the man who had not settled

his political creed was unfit for matrimony. This was said playfully, but the two agreed it would be advisable for John to take his place in public before he took his place as a householder. At present he lived with his widowed mother, who had for some secret reason or other as great, nay, a greater horror of politics than even Mr. Ashton himself.

Dora had long importuned John to take her through some of the poorer streets of Westminster, the Chelsea district for instance. She did not mean slumming in the disguise of a factory girl, but just a stroll through a mean but reputable street. Under persistent pressure he consented, and out of this walk to-day had sprung the meeting with this strange being at his side and the meeting with the beautiful girl so astonishingly like Dora.

Dora had asked, insisted in her enthusiastic way, upon piercing this unknown region of Westminster in order to see some of the London poor in the less noisome of their haunts. At the shocking catastrophe which had overtaken the negro, one of the people, he had fainted and fallen, for the purposes of blighting ridicule, into the hands of this man of the people by his side. This man of the people had mistaken Dora for that girl in Grimsby Street and he had mistaken the girl in Grimsby Street for Dora. This man of the people had introduced him to that girl who was so like Dora and now claimed to be introduced to Dora who was so like that girl. This was indeed the ideal of poetic justice! Dora had been the cause of bringing this man and him together and putting him in this man's power. Dora was an aristocratic advocate of the people. By introducing this man to Dora in Curzon Street he should silence him, thus getting back to the position in which he was before he set out that afternoon and this man should have introduced him to Miss Grace, who was Dora's double, and he should have introduced this man to Dora, who was Miss Grace's double.

So far the situation had all the completeness of a mathematical problem, of a worked-out sum in proportion, of a Roland for an Oliver, or a Chinese puzzle.

But over and above there was, for John Hanbury, a little gain, a tiny profit. Dora in her enthusiasm might have no

objection to walk through the haunts of the people; how would she like the people to walk into her mother's drawing-room, particularly when the people were represented by the poor, maimed, conceited creature at his side.

John Hanbury suddenly looked down. Leigh was hobbling along laboriously at his side. It all at once struck Hanbury with remorse and pity that he had been walking at a pace in no way calculated for the comfort of his companion. In his absorption he had given no heed to the stunted legs and deformed chest at his side. He slackened his steps and said, with the first touch of consideration or kindness he had yet displayed: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Leigh. I fear I have been going too fast."

"Hah!" said the little man, "most young men go too fast."

"I assure you," said he, keeping to the literal meaning of his words, "I was quite unconscious of the rate I was walking at."

"Just so. You forgot me. You were thinking of yourself."

"I am afraid I was not thinking of you."

"Don't bother yourself about me. I am used to be forgotten unless when I can make myself felt. Now you would give a good deal to forget me altogether. Hah!"

"We have not very much farther to go. But I ought to have called a cab."

"And deprived me of the honour of walking beside you! That would have been much more unkind. But I am glad we have not much farther to walk. And you are glad we have not much farther to walk—together. Do you know why you are taking this stroll with me?"

"Oh, yes. It is part of our bargain."

"Ah, the bargain is only an accident. The reason why you are taking this stroll with me is because you do not want to cut a ridiculous figure in the papers."

"No doubt."

"Because you do not want to appear contemptible for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks. How would you like to walk from your childhood to your grave the butt and derision of all who set eyes on you?"

Hanbury did not answer the question.

"This little walk I am taking with you now is only a short stage on the long road I am always travelling between lines of people that point and laugh and jeer and grin and howl at me. I am basking in the splendours of your youth and your fame."

Hanbury did not see his way to say anything to this either.

"Have you read much fiction?" asked Leigh after a pause.

"Well, yes," with a laugh. "Government statistics and Blue Books generally." He wanted to alter the current of conversation if possible.

"I don't mean books of fiction dealing with figures of that kind, but works of fiction dealing with figures of another kind. With human figures for instance. For instance, have you read Hugo's 'Notre Dame'?"

"Yes," with a frown.

"And Dickens's 'Old Curiosity Shop'?"

"Yes," with a shudder.

"And which do you consider the most hideous and loathsome, Quasimodo, Quilp, or Leigh?"

"Mr. Leigh, you surely are not adopting this means of punishing me for my heedlessness in hurrying just now? If so you are adopting an extremely painful way of reminding me of my rudeness."

"Painful means! Painful means! As I live under Heaven, this man is thinking of himself now! Thinking of himself still! He is thinking of the pain it gives him to remember I am a hump-backed cripple, and not of the pain it is to me to be the hump-backed cripple!—to be the owner of the accursed carrion carcase he would spurn into a sewer if he met one open *and it were dark!*"

Leigh paused and flamed and frothed.

"If you allow yourself to give way to such absurd vagaries as these, how do you expect me to fulfil the final part of our compact?"

"Quite right, Mr. Hanbury. I will moderate my raptures, sir. This is not, as you might say, either the time or place for heroics. The idiot boy is a more engaging part than the iconoclast maniac. The truth is, I have eaten nothing to-day yet, and I am a bit light-headed. You don't use eau-

de-cologne? Few men do. I do. It is very refreshing. Now let us go on. I am quite calm."

They had stopped a minute, and Leigh spilled some perfumed spirit from his small silver flask, and inhaled the spirit noisily.

"Hah! I feel all right again. Speaking of the idiot boy makes me think of asking you if, when you were at school, you had the taste for speaking?"

"Mr. Leigh," said Hanbury severely, "you allow yourself great freedom with liberties."

"Ha-ha-ha! Capital. You are right. I should not have said that. You will try to forgive me. I shall remember your words, though. They would go well in a play. But we must dismiss folly. The weather is too hot for repartee. At least, I find it too hot. Talking of heat reminds me of a furnace, and that brings me back to something I said to you about my having made a discovery or invention in chemistry, which will completely outshine mystery gold. The Italians have a saying that as a man grows old he gives up love, and devotes himself to wine. Love has never been much in my way, and now that I have passed the bridge, the *pons asinorum* over which all men who are such asses as to live long enough go when they turn thirty-five, I have no intention of taking to wine, for it does not agree with me. But I am seriously thinking of taking to gold. Gold, sir, is a thing that becomes all times of life and glorifies age. There is a vast fortune in my discovery. Hah!"

"And what may be the nature of your discovery?"

"Do you know anything of chemistry?"

"Nothing."

"Or of metallurgy even?"

"No."

"What a pity! I cannot, therefore, hope to rouse in you the divine enthusiasm of a scientist. I had just come back from Stratford-at-Bow when I had the pleasure and honour of meeting you to-day. I had been down there looking after the first drawing of the retorts, and my expectations had never dared to contemplate such a result as I have reached."

"May I know what your discovery is?"

"The philosopher's stone, sir. Ha-ha-ha! You will laugh at me. So will all sensible men laugh at me when I say I have discovered the philosopher's stone. The universal agent. The great solvent. The mighty elixir. But remember, sir, in the history of the world's progress it is always the sensible men who have been the fools."

"I am afraid you will not have many believers in the beginning."

"I know I shall not. But I do not want many believers. I am not like the advertising stockbrokers who are willing to make any man's fortune but their own. I shall keep my secret dark, and make my fortune in quiet, with no more noise about how I am doing it than an army contractor."

"And what do you purpose making gold out of—lead?"

"No, sir, phosphorus. Out of phosphorus."

"It is the right colour, to begin with."

"And it is in the right place."

"Where?"

"Here," tapping his brown, wrinkled forehead, "in my brain. I am going to turn the phosphorus of my brain into gold. All the things that have been made by man have been made out of the phosphorus of the brain, why not gold also?"

"Truly, why not gold also?"

"You were right when you said I should have few believers at first. In the beginning there will be little or no profit. Bah, let me not talk like a fool. Of course, you and I know that gold cannot be made until we discover the universal atom and learn how to handle it. My discovery is a combination of substances which will defy all the known tests for gold. The dry or the wet method will be powerless confronted with it. The cupel and acid will proclaim it gold. It will scorn the advances of oxygen and remain fixed a thousand years in the snowy heart of the furnace. It will be as flexible as ribbed grass, as ductile as the web of a spider, as malleable as the air between the gold-beater's skins."

"You say it will be almost as dear as gold itself at the beginning."

"Yes, almost as dear as gold."

"How much will it cost?"

"I have not yet counted up all the cost. There are certain ingredients the cost of which it is difficult to ascertain," he said in an abstracted voice.

"This is Mrs. Ashton's house."

Leigh aroused out of the abstraction and looked up. Miss Ashton was at the open window of the drawing-room.

"I am so troubled about the calculation that I am not sure whether it will pay at all to make it. Yesterday morning I had given up all thought of my alchemy. I resolved to direct my studies towards the elixir of life. Yesterday I made up my mind the elixir was beyond me, and I resolved to go on making the gold. To-day I am in doubt again. Like all alchemists, I am superstitious. I shall look for an omen to guide me."

"Miss Ashton is at the window. She recognises you. She is saluting you."

The dwarf drew a pace back from the house and swept the ground with his hat.

"Take that for a good omen," said Hanbury, as he went up to the door.

"Did I not tell you I would show you something more wonderful than mystery gold?"

"Yes."

"Did I keep my word?"

"The likeness is most astonishing. Come in."

"If the likeness is not complete it may go hard with the miracle gold."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN CURZON STREET.

THE Honourable Mrs. Ashton's drawing-room would, under ordinary circumstances, be open to any friend or acquaintance brought there by Hanbury. He was a well-received frequenter of the house, and though the relations between him and Miss Ashton had not been announced, they were understood in the household, and any of the family who were within were always at home to him.

Of course, if Mrs. Ashton's had been an ordinary West-end drawing-room, Hanbury would not bring there a man he had picked up accidentally in the street. But Mrs. Ashton's was not by any means an ordinary West-end drawing-room. Neither good social position nor good coats were essentials in that chamber of liberty. So long as one was distinguished in arts, or science, or politics, but particularly in politics, he was welcome, and all the more if he were a violent Radical. Being merely cracked, did not exclude anyone, so long as the cracked man was clever. Mere cleverness or talent, however, would not qualify for entrance. It was necessary to be fairly respectable in manner and behaviour, and not to be infamous at all. Mrs. Ashton was an enthusiast, but she was no fool. She did not insist upon Dukes being vulgar, or Radicals being fops, but she expected Dukes to be gentlemen, and Radicals before coming to her house to lay aside all arrogance because of their humble birth or position. Mrs. Ashton had the blood of a lady, and the manners of a lady, and the habits of a lady, by reason of her birth and bringing-up. To these qualities she had the good sense to add the heart of a Christian and the good taste to reject the Christian cant. She did not employ either the curses or the slangs of any of the creeds, but contented herself with trying to live up to the principle of the great scheme of charity to be found running through all Christ's teachings. She was an Episcopalian, because her people before her had been Episcopalian, but she had nowhere in the New Dispensation found any law enjoining her to hate Mahommedans or Buddhists, or even Christians of another sect. Indeed, although at heart a pious woman, she preferred not to speak of religious matters. But she set her face against impieties. "To put it on no higher ground," she would say, "they are bad taste, bad form. A blasphemy is not worth uttering unless there is some human being to hear it, and the only reason it is of any value then, is because it hurts or shocks the hearer, and to do anything of the kind ought not to be allowed." So that, having found out Leigh was more or less a Radical, and had streaks of cleverness in him, Hanbury was not very shy of introducing him at Curzon Street.

There was another reason why the young man experienced no doubt of Leigh's welcome. This was Thursday, late in the afternoon, and Mrs. Ashton was at home every Thursday from four to seven. In the little crowd of people who came to her informal receptions, were many of strange and interesting views and theories and faces and figures. Leigh's would, no doubt, be the most remarkable figure present that day, but the callers would be too varied and many-coloured and cosmopolitan to take a painful interest in the dwarf. In the crowd and comparative hurry of a Thursday afternoon, Leigh would have fewer chances than at ordinary times of attracting attention by solecisms of which he might be guilty.

Before knocking at the door, Hanbury turned to Leigh and said: "By the way, there are likely to be a good number of people here at this hour on Thursday."

"I know. An At home."

"Precisely. You will not, of course, say a word about what occurred earlier. I mean in that blind street."

"Welbeck Place, you mean; no, no. Why to speak, to breathe of it among a lot of people who are only your very intimate and most dear friends would be worse than publishing it in every evening newspaper. I suppose no one here will mention anything about it."

"No," answered Hanbury. "No one here," was a great improvement in synonyms for Dora upon "your young lady." This halt and miserable creature seemed capable of education. He had not only natural smartness, but docile receptivity also when he chose to exercise it. "Miss Ashton will say nothing about it," he added aloud. "And now, Mr. Leigh, most of the people you will meet here to-day are smart people, and I should like to know if I may say you are the last and the first of the alchemists, last in point of time and first in point of power? or am I to refer to you as a Radical—you will find several Radicals here?"

"Hah! Neither. Do not refer to me as either an alchemist or a Radical. You said there would be politicians?"

"Yes. Undoubtedly politicians."

"Very good. Introduce me as a Time Server. If

politicians are present they will be curious to see a man of my persuasion. Sir, the dodo is as common as the English goose compared with a man of my persuasion among politicians."

"Is not the joke rather a stupid one? Rather childish? Eh? You can't expect to find that intelligent people will either laugh or wince at such a poor pleasantry? They will only yawn."

"Sir, you do *my* intelligence an injustice when you fancy I try jokes upon men of whose intelligence I am not assured. If there is a joke in what I said, I beg *your* pardon. I had no intention of making one."

"Oh, all right," said Hanbury with a reckless laugh as the door opened and the two entered the house.

While they were going up stairs, Hanbury asked in a tone of amused perplexity:

"How on earth am I to say 'Mr. Leigh, the distinguished Time Server?'"

"You have said it very well now, for a first attempt. You will say it still better after this rehearsal: practice makes perfect."

When they got into the drawing-room, Hanbury led his companion towards Mrs. Ashton, who was standing talking to a distinguished microscopist, Dr. Stein. He had of late been pursuing the unhappy microbe, and had at last pushed the beast into a corner, and when it turned horrent, at bay upon him he had thrust it through the body with an antiseptic poisoned in an epigram, and so slain the beast summarily and for ever. The hostess had been listening to the doctor's account of the expiring groans of the terrified microbe, and had just said with an amused smile:

"And now, Dr. Stein, that the microbe has been disposed of, to what do you intend directing your attention?"

"I am not yet sure. I have not quite decided." The speaker's back was towards the door which Mrs. Ashton faced. "I have been so long devoted to the infinitely little I think I must now attack big game. Having made an end of the microbe, I am going to look through the backward telescope of time and try to start the mastodon again. I am sick of the infinitely little——"

"Ah, Mr. Hanbury," said the hostess, seeing the young

man and his small companion, and feeling that the words of the doctor must be overheard by the dwarf.

"My friend, Mr. Leigh," said Hanbury, with a nervous laugh, "who wishes to be known as a distinguished Time Server, is most anxious to be introduced to you, Mrs. Ashton. Mrs. Ashton—Mr. Leigh." The latter bowed profoundly.

"I am delighted to meet a gentleman who has the courage to describe himself as a time server." She was in doubt as to what he intended to convey, and repeated his description of himself to show she was not afraid of bluntness, even if she did not court it in so aggressive a form.

Dr. Stein moved away and was lost to sight.

"Pardon me," said Leigh, bowing first to her and then to Hanbury, "there is no great courage on my part. It is infamous to be a time server. I am a servant of time."

Hanbury flushed angrily and bit his lip, and secretly cursed his weakness in bringing this man to this place. Before he could control himself sufficiently for speech Leigh went on:

"I am not as great a master of phrases as Mr. Hanbury," (the young man's anger increased), "and in asking him to say time server I made a slip of the tongue."

"Liar!" thought the other man furiously.

"I should have described myself as a servant of time; I am a clock maker."

"The miserable quibbler!" thought Hanbury, somewhat relieved. "I dare say he considers this a telling kind of pun. I am very sorry I did not face the newspapers, rather than bring him here. I must have been mad to think of introducing him."

"And what kind of clock do you admire most, Mr. Leigh?" asked Mrs. Ashton, smiling now. She set down the little man with the short deformed body as an eccentric being who had a taste for verbal tricks, by some supposed to be pleasantries.

"I prefer, madam, the clocks that go."

"Fast or slow?"

"Fast. It is better to beat the sun than to be beaten by the sun."

"But are not the clocks that go correctly the best of all?"

"When a clock marks twenty-five hours to the day we live twenty-five hours to the day: when it marks twenty-three we live twenty-three. There are thus two hours a day in favour of going fast."

"But," said Hanbury, who suddenly recovered his good humour or semblance of it; for Leigh was not doing or saying anything outrageous, and Dora had risen from her seat by the window and was coming towards them. "It does not make any difference whether you go fast or slow, each spindle will wear out in its allotted number of revolutions, no matter what the speed."

"No," said Leigh, his eyes flashing as he caught sight of Miss Ashton. "The machinery is not so liable to rust or the oil to clog when going fast as when going slow. Fluidity of the oil ensures the minimum of friction. Besides, it is better to wear out than to rust out."

"That depends," laughed Hanbury, "on what you are or what you do. Would you like, for instance, to wear out our hangman?"

"That, in its turn, would depend to an enormous extent on the material you set him to work upon?" said Leigh with a saturnine smile.

"So it would, indeed, Mr. Leigh, but let us hope we have not in all this country enough worthy material to try the constitution of the most feeble man. Mr. Leigh, Miss Ashton, my daughter."

Dora smiled and bent graciously to him. He bowed, but not nearly so low as when Hanbury introduced him to her mother. There was no exaggeration in his bow this time. He raised his head more quickly, more firmly, and then threw it up and held it back, looking around him with hard, haughty eyes. To Hanbury's astonishment Leigh appeared quite at his ease. He was neither confused nor insolent.

As Hanbury saw Dora approach and meet Leigh, he was more struck than before with the extraordinary likeness between her and Edith Grace. Dora had just perceptibly more colour in her pale olive face, and just perceptibly more vigour in her movements, and just perceptibly more fire in her eyes; but the difference was extremely slight, and would certainly be missed by an ordinary observer.

Was she still angry with him? She showed him no sign of resentment or forgiveness. She gave her eyes and attention to this man whom he had been forced to bring with him. This lying, malignant satyr, who hid the spirit of the Inquisition in the body of a deformed gorilla! Bah! how could Dora Ashton, whose blood went back to the blood of those who escaped the Saxon spears and shafts and blades at Hastings, look with interest and favour upon this misshapen manikin!

"Yes," went on Leigh, turning to Mrs. Ashton, "I am a servant of time. I am now engaged in making a clock which will, I think, be the most remarkable in the world."

"Have you been to Strasburg?" asked Hanbury, because he believed Leigh had not been there.

"Bah! Strasburg, no! Why should I go to Strasburg? To see other clocks is only to see how effects have been produced. With a conjuror the great difficulty is not to discover how to perform any trick, but to discover a trick that will be worth performing. If you tell any mediocre mechanist of an effect produced in mechanism, he can tell how it is done or how it could be done."

"What! Can you construct a clock like Burdeau's, I mean one that would produce the same effects?" asked Hanbury with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"Produce the same effect! Easily. Burdeau's clock represented Louis XIV. surrounded by upper lackeys, other monarchs who did him homage. Hah! There is nothing easier. It is more fit for a puppet show to amuse the groundlings of a country fair than for a monumental work of genius like a great clock."

"Did not the machinery of Burdeau's clock go wrong upon the occasion of its public exhibition?" asked Hanbury with a polite, malicious smile.

"It did, and the figure of the Grand Monarque, who, like me, was not over tall, instead of receiving homage from the figure of William III., fell down before the effigy of William and grovelled. Bah! there was no difficulty or merit in producing that effect."

"I was thinking of some effect wrought by that public exhibition and eccentricity on the part of the clock."

"You mean getting Burdeau thrown into the Bastille by the Grand Monarque."

"Yes. Do you think an effect of that kind could be produced in our day by a clock?"

"Upon a clock maker?"

"Suppose so."

"Hah! You would, no doubt, like *me* to try it."

"Well, you boasted you could produce any effect."

"Hah! If they did take me and throw me into the Bastille to-day, now, at this moment, I should not mind it, nor would my clock mind it either. It is not in the power of any king or potentate of earth to divorce me from my clock!" He swelled out his chest and flung his shoulders and head back.

"What! Even if he put you in the Bastille? Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Hanbury derisively. "That is too much, indeed. Why, it is not clock making, but necromancy."

The little man stepped back a pace, looked at Hanbury contemptuously from head to foot, and said:

"It is true, although you may not be able to understand it." Then turned to Mrs. Ashton. "A clock cannot be made to go for ever quite independent of man. But I think I have invented a new means of dealing with clocks; indeed, I am quite sure my plan is absolutely new. If a constitutional tyrant were to lock me up in any bastille this instant, my clock, I mean what of it is now completed and in working order, would be wound up to-night between twelve and one o'clock, just as if I were there. I admit no stranger into my work-shop."

"That is very extraordinary," said Miss Ashton, speaking for the first time.

Leigh made a gesture deprecating extraordinariness.

"I am not going in for any nonsense about perpetual motion. There will be thousands of figures in my clock, thousands of automaton Figures of Time to move in one endless procession. These figures will differ from all others to be found in horloges. They will be designed wholly to please and educate the eye by their artistic virtues and graces. The mechanical movements will be wholly subject to naturalness and beauty. I have been in great difficulty

to find a worthy model for my Pallas-Athena. Until to-day I was in despair."

There appeared nothing unpleasantly marked or emphatic in Leigh's manner; but Hanbury knew he meant the model for the donor of the olive had been found in Dora. Good Heavens! this creature had dared to select as model for some imperfectly draped figure in this raree-show of charlatan mechanism the girl to whom *he*, John Hanbury, was engaged!

Mrs. Ashton understood the implication in the speech by an almost imperceptible reverence of the poor blighted deformed body to her beautiful, shapely, well-born daughter. A look of amusement and tenderness came into her thin, mobile, sympathetic face. "And you have been so fortunate as to find a model for your goddess?"

"Yes, and no. I did not find so much a model for my goddess as a goddess who had strayed down from the heights of Greek myth."

"This must be a lucky day with you, Mr. Leigh," Mrs. Ashton said pleasantly, and speaking as though his words referred to no one in whom she took interest. She was curious to see how he would extricate himself from a direct question. That would test his adroitness. "And when did you meet your divinity?"

"In the afternoon. I saw her in the afternoon." He looked angrily at Hanbury. The latter thought, "He is under obligation not to say anything of the Welbeck Place event; he, the traitorous wretch, will content himself with referring to it, so that Dora and I may know what he means. The false sneak!" He felt his face burn and blaze.

Other people came in, and Hanbury moved off a little and looked at Leigh and swayed his head slightly, beckoning him away.

Dora turned pale. She knew nothing of what had passed between the two men since she saw them last, and felt faint when she thought of John Hanbury's rage if the little man referred to their earlier meeting. Yet she could not believe he was going to speak of that. Why had John brought him here? She had no need to guess who the goddess was. She herself was the deity meant by him. That was plain enough.

"Mr. Hanbury was with me at the time," said Leigh, disregarding the signal made by the other.

Hanbury fixed his eyes on the méchanist with threatening deliberateness. Dora grew cold and paler and faint. She felt there was certain to be a scene, a most unpleasant scene. Mrs Ashton saw nothing, understood nothing.

"Had we not better move aside, Mr. Leigh? I am afraid we are blocking the way." He thought: "This beast has saved up his poison till now. He will strike here."

"No, no," said Mrs. Ashton, energetically. "I shall hear of nothing better all day than a goddess—it is not to be expected I can hear of anything better. Where did you meet this Pallas-Athena?"

"In Grimsby Street," answered Leigh with a bow to Miss Ashton, and a look of malignant triumph at Hanbury.

The latter started and looked round him with as much surprise as if he suddenly found himself unexpectedly in a strange place. This man was too subtle and lithe for him. Who could have expected this wriggle?

Dora glanced up with an expression of relief. The colour came back quickly to her face, and the aspect of alarmed expectancy vanished.

Mrs. Ashton turned from one to another, with quick, enquiring, puzzled eyes. She saw now there was something unusual beneath the surface of all this. "What is the mystery? You will tell me, Mr. Leigh?"

"No mystery at all," answered Leigh, in a quick, light, off-hand way. "I happened to come across Mr. Hanbury accidentally, and we met the lady of whom I speak."

"Oh, then she is a lady. She is not a professional model."

"Hah! No. She is not a professional model. She is a lady, of a Derbyshire family."

"I wonder do I know her. May I hear her name?"

"Mr. Hanbury will, I have no doubt, tell you," said Leigh, moving off with a smile. "He was introduced to her at the meeting, I was not. He was as much struck by the likeness as I."

"The likeness! The likeness to Pallas-Athena?" said Mrs. Ashton in perplexity.

"Yes," said the dwarf with another smile, as he made room for two men who were coming up the room to Mrs. Ashton.

CHAPTER XIV

SPIRIT AND FLESH.

THE folding-doors between the back and front drawing-rooms at Mrs. Ashton's were thrown open, and both rooms were full that Thursday afternoon. Some of the visitors were standing, some sitting, and many ladies and gentlemen were moving about. A few had cups of tea, and all seemed to wish to appear pleased and pleasant. If serious matters were mentioned or discussed, it was in a light and desultory way. It was impossible to plan ground for the foundation of enduring structures in politics, or taste, or art, or science, or polemics, when a humourist might come up and regard what you were saying as the suggestion for a burlesque, opera or harlequinade. All the talk was touch-and-go, and as bright and witty as the speakers could make it. There was an unceasing clatter of tongues and ripple of laughter, which had not time to gather volume. Most of the people were serious and earnest, but the great bulk of the dialogue was artificial, designedly and deliberately artificial, for the purpose of affording relief to the speakers. Mrs. Ashton held that the most foolish way to spend life is to be always wise. These At homes were for recreation, not for the solemnities of work. People took no liberties, but all were free. Even such sacred subjects as the franchise, drainage, compound interest, the rights of the subject, and oysters, were dealt with lightly on Thursdays in Curzon Street.

As Oscar Leigh followed John Hanbury slowly from the immediate vicinity of Mrs. Ashton, his ears were aware of many and various voices saying many and various things, but he paid no attention to voices or words. He was all eyes. Miss Ashton was moving away to her former place by the window. She was accompanied by a tall, grizzled, military-looking man, who, to judge by her quick glances

and laughing replies, was amusing and interesting her very much.

"That was a wild prank of yours," said Hanbury, bending over the little man and laying admonitory emphasis on his words. "You ought not to play tricks like that in a place like this. Everyone who saw and heard, Mrs. Ashton of course among the number, must have noticed your manner and the effect your words had upon——" He paused. They were standing in the second window-place. He did not like to say "upon me," for that would be an admission he had felt alarmed or frightened; it would also imply a suspicion of Leigh's trustworthiness in keeping his word and the secret.

The clock maker did not say anything for a moment. He had no intention of helping Hanbury over the pause. It was his design, on the contrary, to embarrass the other as much as he could. He looked up with an innocent expression of face, and asked, "The effect of my manner on what, or whom?"

"Well," said Hanbury, with hesitation, "upon anyone who heard. Tricks of that kind may be amusing, but I am afraid you did not improve your credit for sense with Miss Ashton by what you said and your way of saying it. For a moment I felt afraid she might be surprised into an expression that would betray all."

"*You!*" cried Leigh in a low tone of wild amazement. "*You* were afraid Miss Ashton might have been surprised into an expression that would have betrayed all?"

"Yes. She was not prepared for your little sally and your subtlety," said Hanbury with a frown. "It was intolerable to have to speak of Dora Ashton, his Dora, his wife that was to be, to this mechanic, or mechanist, or mechanician, or whatever he happened to be. "Miss Ashton might have been taken off her guard."

"Bah, sir! *You* might have been surprised and taken off *your* guard by what I said, but not *she!* Hah!" He said this with a secret mocking laugh. "I am fairly astonished at a man of your intelligence, Mr. Hanbury, mistaking me for a fool. I *never* make mistakes about people. I never make wrong estimates of the *men* or *women* I meet. I would trust Miss Ashton in any position

of danger or difficulty, any situation requiring courage or tact."

"I am sure if she knew your high estimate of her she would be enormously flattered," said Hanbury, with a sneer.

"No, she would not. She is not the woman to be flattered by anything, and certainly not by any such trifle as my opinion of her good sense. *You* ought to know as much by this time. You and she are engaged?"

The cool assurance of the dwarf's manner, and the simple directness of the question with which he finished his speech, had the effect of numbing Hanbury's faculties, and confusing his purpose. "The relations between Miss Ashton and me are not a subject I care to speak of, and I beg of you to say no more of the matter," said he, with clumsiness, arising from disgust and annoyance, and the sense of helplessness.

"Hah! I thought so. Now if you were only as clever as Miss Ashton, you would not allow me to find out how matters stood between you and her, as you have plainly done by your answer. You are a young man, and in life many things are against a young man. In an encounter of this kind his bad temper is his chief foe. Hah!"

Hanbury's head was fiery hot, and his mind in a whirl. Things and people around him were blurred and dim to his eyes. "I have performed my part of the contract," he said with impotent fury, "Had we not better go now? This is no place for scenes or lectures, for lectures by even the most able and best qualified."

This conversation had been conducted in suppressed voices, inaudible to all ears but those of the speakers, and most of it by the open window, Miss Ashton being at her former position in the other one looking into the street.

"Yes, you have done your part. You have introduced me to Miss Ashton, or rather Mrs. Ashton has done so, and that is the same thing. I am perfectly satisfied so far. I do not ask you to do any more. I am not a levier of black-mail. I, too, have performed my part of the contract. So far we are quits. We are as though we had never met. If you have any engagement or wish that draws you away from this place I do not see why you should remain. If you want to go, by all means go. I shall stay. Hah!"

"What! Mr. Leigh, you do not mean to say you intend using my introduction here, which I undertook in compliance with your whim, as the means of effecting a lodgment!"

Leigh sprinkled a few drops of eau-de-cologne from his little silver flask into the palms of his long brown-yellow hands and sniffed it up noisily. "You do not use eau-de-cologne? You are wrong. It is refreshing—most refreshing. If you had been poring over retorts and crucibles until your very marrow was turned to dust, burnt-up to powder, you'd appreciate eau-de-cologne. It's most refreshing. It is, indeed. I am not going away from this place yet; but do not let me detain you if business or pleasure is awaiting you anywhere else. Do not stand on ceremony with me, my dear sir."

Hanbury ground his teeth and groaned. Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea was pleasant company compared with this hideous monster. Go from this place leaving him behind! John Hanbury would sooner fling himself head-foremost from that window than walk down the stairs without this hateful incubus. He now knew Leigh too well to try and divert or win him from his purpose. The dwarf was one of those men who see the object they desire to the exclusion of all other objects, and never take their eyes off it until it is in their hands. Once having brought Leigh here, he must hold himself at his mercy until it pleased the creature to take himself off. How deplorably helpless and mean and degraded he felt! He had never been in so exasperating and humiliating a position before, and to feel as he felt now, and be so circumstanced in this house above all other houses in London! It was not to be borne.

Then he reflected on the events which had drawn him into the predicament. He had gone down that atrocious Chetwynd Street at Dora's request, and against his own wish, conviction, instinct. They had seen the hateful place, and the odious people who lived there. That accident had befallen him, and while he was insensible Dora had given this man their names. He had come back to prevent their names getting into the newspapers, and found this man in the act of meditating a paragraph, with the "Post Office Directory" before him. He saw this man

was not open to a money-bribe, but still he was open to a bribe, and the bribe was, to state it shortly, bringing him here, and introducing him to Dora. He introduced him to Mrs. Ashton, and, seeing that he brought Leigh to her house, she naturally thought he was a great friend of his! Good heavens, a great friend of his!

Only for Dora nothing of this would ever have happened. It all arose out of her foolish interest in the class of people of whom Leigh was a specimen. It was poetic justice on her that Leigh should insist upon coming here. Would it not be turning this visit into a useful lesson to her if she were allowed to see more of this specimen of the people? The kind of mind this man had? The kind of man he was? Yes, they should go to Dora.

During the progress of Leigh and Hanbury through the room to Mrs. Ashton, and on their way from her to the window, Hanbury had met a score of people he knew intimately, and several others with whom he was acquainted. He had nodded and spoken a few words of greeting right and left, and, when there was any likelihood of friends expecting more of him, had glanced at his companion to intimate that he was engaged and devoted to him. Whatever was to happen, it would not do to allow the clock maker to break away from him, and mingle unaccompanied in the throng. While the two were at the window, Hanbury stood with his back to the room, in front of Leigh, so that he himself might not easily be accosted, and Leigh should be almost hidden from view.

He now made a violent effort to compose his mind and his features, and with an assumption of whimsical good humour turned round and faced the room. He had in a dismal and disagreeable way made up his mind to brazen out this affair. Let them both go to Dora, and when he was alone with her after dinner he could arrange that Leigh was not to come here again, for apart from Leigh's general objectionableness it would be like living in a powder magazine with a lunatic possessing flint and steel to be in Ashton's house with a man who held the secret of Chetwynd Street or Welbeck Place, or whatever the beastly region was called.

"I am not in the least hurry away from this, Mr. Leigh,"

said he, partly turning to the other. "It occurred to me that the place might be dull to you."

"On the contrary, the place and the people are most interesting to me. I am not, as you may fancy, much of a society man. I go out but little. I am not greatly sought after, Mr. Hanbury; and I do not think you can consider it unreasonable in me to wish to see this thing out." He was speaking suavely and pleasantly now, and when one was not looking at him there appeared nothing in his tone or manner to suggest disagreeableness, unless the heavy thick breathing, half wheeze, half gasp.

"But there is nothing to be seen out. There is no climax to these At homes. People come and chat and perhaps drink a cup of tea and go away. That is all. By the way, the servant has just set down some tea by Miss Ashton; perhaps you would like a cup."

"I have had no breakfast. I have eaten nothing to-day."

"I am sorry for that. I am greatly afraid they will not give you anything very substantial here; nothing but a cup of tea and a biscuit or wafer slice of bread. But let us get some. Half a loaf is better than no bread." He forced a smile, as pleasant a one as he could command.

"I shall be most grateful for a cup of tea from Miss Ashton's hands," said the dwarf graciously.

"He can," thought Hanbury, as they moved towards the other window, where Miss Ashton was now standing over a tiny inlaid table on which rested the tea equipage, "be quite human when he likes." Aloud he said, "I hope you will be more guarded this time?"

"I am always guarded—and armed. I shall be glad to take the useful olive from Pallas-Athena."

"And the olive bough too, I hope," said Hanbury under an impulse of generosity.

"It was a dove not a goddess brought the olive bough."

"But the dove was only a messenger."

"The olive bough was only a symbol; the olive itself was substantive good."

"But is not the symbol of peace better than an earthly meal?"

"Answer your own case out of your own mouth. I have

never eaten to-day. I have never eaten yet in all my life. You are filled with divine luxuries. Go you your gait, I go mine. Tell me, Mr. Hanbury, would you rather have the spirit of my promise to you or the flesh of my promise?"

"I do not know exactly what you mean."

"Would you rather trust my word or see my dead body? If I were dead I could not speak."

"Trust your word beyond all doubt," said Hanbury with a perplexed and uneasy smile.

"Hah! I believe you believe what you say. But I am afraid your shoulders are not broad enough, your back is not strong enough for the faith you profess in me. I don't suppose you'd go to the extremity of murdering me, but at this moment you would not be sorry if I fell dead at your feet. Hah!"

"Pray do not say such a horrible thing. I assure you it is not true. Indeed you wrong me. I do not want the miserable thing talked about——"

"Sir, are you referring to me? I am the only miserable thing here."

"You are incorrigible."

"You are mistaken, sir. I am as plastic as wax; but like wax, if the fingers that touch me are cold I become brittle."

"If you persist how are we to approach Miss Ashton?"

"Thus! Follow me!"

He threw back his head haughtily, and glancing with scorn from side to side, strode to the table over which bent the exquisite face and figure of Dora.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUBSTITUTE FOR GOLD.

THE air of pleasant badinage which pervaded the room had no more effect on Oscar Leigh than on the gaselier. No one spoke to him, for no one knew him. Except what passed between Leigh and Hanbury all words were intended

for any ears who might hear. Intensities of individuality were laid aside at the threshold. Those whose individuality pursued and tyrannized over them like a Frankenstein remained away. They did not put it to themselves in this way. They told themselves they found the place too mixed or too light or too frivolous or too distracting.

Oscar Leigh was in no degree influenced by the humour or manner of the people present. These chattering men and women were indifferent to him, so long as he did not see how to put them to any use or find them in his way. He was not accustomed to the society of ladies and gentlemen, and consequently he omitted little customary observances. But he was not inured to any society at all, and this saved him from vulgarities; and then he was much used to commune with himself, which gave him directness and simplicity of manner.

One of the things affording freshness and vitality to Leigh was that he did not feel the need of common-places. Common-places are the tribute which intelligence pays to stupidity. They are the inventions of a beneficent Satan in the interest of the self-respect of fools.

"Miss Ashton," said Leigh bowing without emphasis or a smile, "I have ventured to come to beg a cup of tea of you."

She looked at him with a smile and said, "You have chosen the right moment. I have just got a fresh supply."

"This is a very fortunate day for me. It may be the most fortunate day of my life."

"And what is the nature of the good fortune you have found to-day?" she asked, handing him a tiny cup, while the servant who still lingered near offered him some thin bread-and-butter. There were half-a-dozen films on an exquisite china dish. Leigh took one, doubled it twice, and ate it greedily.

"You will let me have all? I have tasted no food to-day."

"Oh, certainly. I am afraid all is very little. But James can get us more." A faint colour had come into Miss Ashton's face. James, the servant, who had been christened Wilfrid, passed his disengaged hand over his mouth to conceal a smile. Hanbury flushed purple. For

a moment there was a pause in the talk of those within hearing.

"What's the matter?" asked a very young man with a very fresh healthy-looking face of a chatty dowager who was looking through a gold-rimmed eye-glass at the dwarf.

"Hanbury's friend, the dwarf, is *eating*!"

"Good Heavens!" cried the young man leaning against the wall at his back as in dismay.

Leigh went on eating.

"It is excellent bread-and-butter," said he when he had finished the last slice. "I have never tasted better."

Hanbury stooped to pick up nothing and whispered, "This is not a restaurant," fierce'y into Leigh's ear.

"Eh? No. I am well aware of that," said the other in an ordinary tone and quite audibly. "You would not find such good bread-and-butter as that in any restaurant I know of. Or it may be that I was very hungry."

"Shall I get some more?" asked Miss Ashton, who had by this time recovered from her surprise and was beaming with good-natured amusement.

"You are very kind, thank you. It was enough."

"I tell you what it is, Lady Forcar, that is a remarkable person," said the young man with the fresh complexion, to the dowager.

"If people hear of this it will become the fashion," said Lady Forcar, whose complexion never altered except in her dressing-room or when the weather was excessively hot.

"What?" asked the young man. "What will become the fashion?"

"Eating."

"How shocking!"

"If that man had only money and daring and a handsome young wife, he could do anything—anything. He could make pork sausages the rage. Have you ever eaten pork sausages, Sir Julius?"

"Thousands of times. They are often the only things I can eat for breakfast, but not in London. One should never eat anything they can make in London."

"Pork is a neglected animal," said Lady Forcar with a sigh. "It must be years since I tasted any."

"You know pork isn't exactly an animal?"

"No. Pork sausages are animalculæ of pork with bread and thyme and sweet marjoram and fennel and mint. Have you ever taken it into your mind, Sir Julius, to explain why it is that while a pig when alive is far from agreeable company, no sooner does he die than all the romantic herbs of the kitchen garden gather round him?"

"No doubt it comes under the head of natural selection."

"No doubt it does. Have you ever tried to account for the fact that there are no bones in pork sausages?"

"I fancy it may be explained by the same theory of natural selection. The bones select some other place."

"True. Very true. *That* never occurred to me before. Do you know I have often thought of giving up my intellect and devoting the remainder of my days to sensualism."

"Good gracious, Lady Forcar, that sounds appalling."

"It does. If I had as much genius as that humpbacked little man, I'd do it, but I feel my deficiency; I know I haven't the afflatus."

"The thing sounds very horrible as you put it. For what form of sensualism would you go in? climate? or soap? or chemical waters? or yachting?"

"None of them. Simply pork. You observe that the people who are nearest the sensible and uncorrupted beasts worship pork. If you hear anyone speak well of pork, that person is a sensualist at heart. I sigh continually for pork. The higher order of apes, including man, live in trees and on fruits that grow nearer to Heaven than any other thing. Cows and sheep and low types of man and brutes of moderate grossness eat things they find on the earth, such as grass and corn, and hares and deer and goats, but it is only pigs and men of the lowest types that burrow into the ground for food. The lowest creature of all is the sensualist, who not only eats potatoes and turnips and carrots but the very pigs that root for things nature has had the decency to hide away from the sight of the eyes of angels and of men. Can you conceive anything lower in the scale of sensual joy or more delicious than pork and onions? I tell you, Sir Julius, if this humpbacked dwarf only had money, a handsome wife and

courage, he could popularize sausages being served before the soup. He is the only man since Napoleon the Great who has the manner of power sufficient for such a reform."

"Let us devoutly hope, Lady Forcar, that he may bring about the blessed change, that is if you wish it."

"Wish it! Good Heavens, Sir Julius, you don't for a moment fancy me capable of trifling with such a subject! I say to you deliberately, it is the only thing which would now save Society from ennui and its present awful anxiety about the temperature of the soup."

The dowager Lady Forcar was well known for her persiflage, her devotion to her young and plain daughter-in-law, the head now of her son's house, her inch-thick paint, of which she spoke freely and explained on the grounds of keeping in the swim, and her intense interest in all that affected the welfare of the rural cottager.

Sir Julius Whinfield, in spite of his very fresh young face and affectation, was an excellent authority on Hebrew and the manufacture of silk, so that if he had only happened to live once upon a time he might have talked wisdom to Solomon and dresses with Solomon's wives. He was not a clever conversationalist, but when not under pressure could say sound things pithily. Of Lady Forcar he once declared that he never understood what a saint must have been like when living until he met her. This did not come to her ears and had nothing to do with her liking for the young man.

The tall, military-looking man who had been speaking to Miss Ashton, and who was not a soldier but a composer of music, now came up and said:

"I am in sore need of you, Lady Forcar. I am about to start a new crusade. I am going to try to depose the greatest tyrant of the time."

"And who is that? Wagner? Bismarck? The Russian Bear? The Higher Culture?"

"No. Soap. I am of opinion that this age can do no good so long as it is bound to the chariot wheels of soap. This is the age of science, and soap is its god. Old Q. once became impatient with the river Thames, and said he could see nothing in it——"

"He was born too soon. In his time they had not begun to spy into the slums of nature. For my part I think the microscope is the tyrant of this age. What did old Q. say about our father Tiber?"

"He said he could see nothing in it, that it always went flow—flow—flow, and that was all."

"One must not expect too much of a river. A river is no more than human, after all. But what has soap been doing?"

"Nothing; and in the fact that it has been doing nothing lies one of my chief counts against it. Of old you judged a man by the club to which he belonged, the number of his quarterings, the tailor who made his clothes, the income he had, the wife he married, the horses he backed, or the wine he drank. Now we classify men according to the soap they use. There are more soaps now than patent medicines."

"Soaps are patent medicine for external use only," said Lady Forcar, touching her white plump wrist.

"There may be some sense in a pill against the earthquake, or against an unlucky star, but how on earth can soap be of any use? First you smear a horrid compound over you, and then you wash it off as quickly as possible. Can anything be more childish? It is even more childish than the Thames. It can't even flow of itself. It is a relic of barbarism."

"But are not we ourselves relics of barbarism? Suppose you were to abolish all relics of barbarism in man, you would have no man at all. Heads, and arms, and bodies, are relics of barbaric man. Had not barbaric man heads, and arms, and bodies? Are you going to abolish heads, and arms, and bodies?"

"Well," said Mr. Anstruther, the composer, "I don't know. I think they might be reduced. Anyway," dropping his voice, and bending over her ladyship, "our little friend here, whom Mr. Hanbury brought in, manages to hold his own, and more than hold his own, with less of such relics of barbarism than most of us."

"I was just saying to Sir Julius when you, Mr. Anstruther, came up, that I consider the stranger the most remarkable man I ever met in this house, and quite capable of undertaking and carrying out any social revolution, even to the

discrediting of soap. If you have been introduced bring him to me."

"I haven't, unfortunately, but I'll tell Hanbury, who looks as black as thunder, that you would like to speak to him."

"I have scarcely seen Miss Ashton to-day. Let us go to them. That is the simplest way," said Lady Forcar, rising and moving towards the place where Dora, Hanbury, and Leigh stood.

When Leigh finished eating the bread-and-butter and drinking the tiny cup of tea, he said: "You wish, Miss Ashton, to know in what way I have been lucky to-day?"

She looked in perplexity at Hanbury, and then at the dwarf. She had no doubt he had alluded to her when he spoke of having found a model for the Pallas-Athena. An average man accustomed to ordinary social observances would not pursue that kind of flattery any further, but could this man be depended on? He certainly was not an ordinary man, and as certainly he was not accustomed to ordinary social observances. If he pursued that subject it would be embarrassing. It was quite plain John was in a very bad humour. He deserved to be punished for his pusillanimous selfishness to-day, but there were limits beyond which punishment ought not to be pressed. She would forgive John now and try to make the best of the situation. She felt convinced that John would not have brought this man here except under great pressure. Let him be absolved from further penalties.

She said pleasantly: "One always likes to hear of good fortune coming to those in whom one is interested." Nothing could be more bald, or commonplace, or trite, yet in the heart of Leigh the words made joyous riot. She had implied, even if she did not mean her implication, that she took an interest in *him*.

"I was speaking a moment ago about the figures of time in my clock. I had the honour of telling Mrs. Ashton that there would be thousands of them, and that they would be modelled, not chiefly or at all for the display of mechanism, but in the first place as works of art; to these works of art mechanism would be adapted later."

"Which will make your clock the only one of the kind in

the world," said she, much relieved to find no pointed reference to herself.

"Precisely. But I did not do myself the honour of telling Mrs. Ashton of what material the figures were to be composed."

"No. I do not think you said what they would be made of. Wax, is it not?" With the loss of apprehension on her own account, she had gained interest in this wonderful clock.

"The models will of course be made of wax, but the figures themselves, the figures which I intend to bequeath to posterity, will be made of gold."

"Gold! All those figures made of gold! Why, your clock will cost you a fortune."

"It will not cost *me* as much as it would cost any other man living. I am going to make the gold too." He drew himself up, and looked proudly round.

At this moment Lady Forcar and Mr. Anstruther came up, and introductions took place. Leigh submitted to the introductions as though he had no interest in them beyond the interruption they caused in what he was saying.

Miss Ashton briefly placed Lady Forcar and Mr. Anstruther in possession of the subject, and then Leigh went on. He no longer leant upon his stick. He straightened himself, threw back his head haughtily, and kept it back. He shifted his stout gnarled stick into his left hand and thrust the long, thin, fallow, hairy fingers of his right hand into the breast of his coat, and looked around as though challenging denial.

"I have," he said, "invented a metal, a compound which is absolutely indistinguishable from gold, which is in fact gold, and of which I shall make my figures. Mystery gold was a clumsy juggle that one found out in the fire. My gold is *bonâ fide* a miracle, and I have called it Miracle Gold. My gold will resist the acid, and the blow-pipe, and the crucible. As I live, if they provoke me, I will sell them not metal miracle gold, but perchloride of miracle gold. No one can doubt me then!"

"And will you be able, Mr. Leigh, to make not only enough for your figures but some for sale also?" asked Mr. Anstruther.

"I may be able to spare a little, but my gold cannot be sold for a chapman's price. It will cost me much in money and health and risk, and even then the yield will be small."

"In health and risk?" said Miss Ashton, in a tone of concern and sympathy. "How in health and risk?" He seemed even now to have but little store of health.

He lowered his head and abated the arrogance of his manner. "The steam of fusing metals and fumes of acids are not for men who would live long, Miss Ashton. They paralyse the muscles and eat into the wholesome flesh of those whose flesh is wholesome, while with one who is not fashioned fair to the four winds of attack, the end comes with insidious speed. Then for the risk, there are conjunctions of substances that, both in the dry and the wet, lead often to unexpected ebullitions and rancorous explosions of gas or mere forces that kill. There may spring out of experiments vapours more deadly than any known now, poisons that will slay like the sight of the angel of death."

"Then, Mr. Leigh," said the girl, with eyes fixed upon him, "why need you make these figures of time of such costly material?"

"Ah, there may be reasons too tedious to relate."

"And does the good fortune you speak of concern the manufacture of this miracle gold?" she asked with a faint flush, and eyes shining with anxiety.

"It does."

"A discovery which perhaps will make the manufacture less dangerous?"

"Which would make the manufacture unnecessary."

She clasped her hands before her with delight, and cried while her eyes shone joyously into his, "Oh, that would be lucky indeed. And how will you know if your augury of good fortune will come true?"

"You are interested?" He bent his head still lower, and his voice was neither so firm nor so harsh.

"Intensely. You tell us your life may be endangered if you go on. Tell us you think you can avoid the risk."

"I do not know yet."

"When can you know?"

"Would you care to hear as soon as I know?"

"Oh, yes."

"I shall, I think, be certain by this day week."

"Then come to us again next Thursday. We shall all be here as we are now?"

"Thank you, Miss Ashton, I will. Good day."

He backed a pace and bowed to her, and then turned round, and, with head erect and scornful eyes flashing right and left, but seeing nothing, strode out of the room.

"Dora," whispered Lady Forcar, "you have made another conquest. That little genius is in love with you."

The girl laughed, but did not look up for a moment. When she did so her eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

RED HERRINGS.

DEALERS in marine stores generally select quiet by-ways, back-waters of traffic, for the scene of their trade. In the open high roads of business the current is too quick for them. They buy and sell substantial and weighty articles; their transactions are few and far between. Those who come to sell may be in haste; those who come to buy, never. No one ever yet rushed into a marine-store dealer's and hammered with his money on a second-hand copper, in lieu of a counter, and shouted out that he could not wait a moment for a second-hand iron tripod. It is extremely doubtful if a marine store dealer ever sells anything. Occasionally buying of ungainly, heavy, amorphous, valueless-looking bundles goes on, but a sale hardly ever. Who, for instance, could want an object visible in the business establishment of John Timmons, Tunbridge Street, London Road? The most important-looking article was a donkey-engine without a funnel, or any of its taps, and with a large rusty hole bulged in its knobby boiler. Then there lay a little distance from the engine the broken beam of a large pair of scales and the huge iron scoop of another pair. After this, looking along the left-hand side out of the gloom towards the door, lay three cannon-shot, for guns of different calibres; then the funnel of a locomotive, flat, and making

a very respectable pretence of having been the barrel from which the cannon-shot had dribbled, instead of flown, because of the barrel's senile decay. After the funnel came a broken anvil, around the blockless and deposed body of which gathered—no doubt for the sake of old lang syne—two sledge-hammer heads, without handles, and the nozzle of a prodigious forge-bellows. Next appeared a heap of chunks of leaden pipe. Next a patch of mutilated cylindrical half-hundred weights, like iron mushrooms growing up out of the ferruginous floor. The axle-tree and boxes of a cart stood against the wall, like the gingham umbrella of an antediluvian giant, and keeping them company the pillars and trough of a shower-bath, plainly the stand into which the umbrella ought to have been placed, if the dead Titan had had any notion of tidiness. Then appeared the cistern of the shower-bath, like the Roundhead iron cap of the cyclopean owner of the umbrella. Then spread what one might fancy to be the mouth of a mine of coffee mills, followed by a huge chaotic pile of rusty and broken guns and swords, and blunderbusses and pistols. Beyond this chaotic patch, a ton of nuts and screws and bolts; and later, a bank of washers, a wire screen, five dejected chimney-jacks, the stock of an anchor, broken from the flukes, several hundred fathoms of short chains of assorted lengths, half a bundle of nailrod iron, three glassless ship's lamps, a pile of brazen miscellanies, a pile of iron miscellanies, a pile of copper miscellanies and then the doorless opening into Tunbridge Street, and standing on the iron-grooved threshold, into which the shutters fitted at night, Mr. John Timmons in person, the owner of this flourishing establishment.

Mr. John Timmons was a tall and very thin man, of fifty years, or thereabouts. His face was dust-colour, with high, well-padded cheek bones, blue eyes and insignificant cocked nose. His hair was dark brown, touched here and there with grey, curly, short, thin. He wore a low-crowned brown felt hat and a suit of dark chocolate tweed, the trousers being half a span too short over his large shoes, and the waistcoat half a span too wide, half a span too long, and buttoned up to the deep-sunken hollow of his scraggy throat. His neck was extremely long and thin and wrinkled, and

covered with sparse greyish hair. His ears were enormous, and stood out from his ill-shapen head like fins. They were iron-grey, the colour of the under surface of a bat's wing. The forehead was low, retreating, and creased with close parallel lines. The eyes were keen, furtive, suspicious. A hand's-breath below the sharp, large apple of his throat, and hanging loose upon the waistcoat, was the knot of a washed-out blue cotton neckerchief. He wore long mutton-chop whiskers. The rest of the face was covered with a short, grizzled stubble. When he was not using his hands, he carried them thrust down to the utmost in his trousers' pockets, showing a wide strip of red sinewy arm between the sleeve of his coat and the pocket of the trousers. No shirt was visible, and the neckerchief touched the long, lank neck, there being no collar or trace of linen. Excepting the blue patch of neckerchief on his chest, and his blue eyes, no positive colour appeared anywhere about the man. No part of the man himself or of his clothes was clean.

Mr. Timmons was taking the air on his own threshold late in the afternoon of that last Thursday in June. It was now some hours since the dwarf had called and had held that conversation with him in the cellar. Not a human being had entered the marine store since. Mr. Timmons was gazing out of his watchet blue eyes in a stony and abstracted way at the dead brick wall opposite. He had been standing in this position for a good while, now shifting the weight of his body to one foot, now to the other. Occasionally he cleared his throat, which, being a supererogation, showed that he was in deep thought, for no man, in his waking moments, could think of clearing so long a throat without ample reason. The sound he made was so deep and sepulchral it seemed as though he had left his voice behind him in the cellar, and it was becoming impatient there.

Although it had not yet struck six o'clock, he was thinking of closing his establishment. At this time of the day very few people passed through Tunbridge Street; often a quarter of an hour went by bringing no visitor. But after six the street became busier, for with the end of the working day came more carts and vans and barrows to rest for the night with their shafts thrust up in the air, after their particular

manner of sleeping. This parking of the peaceful artillery of the streets Mr. Timmons looked on with dislike, for it brought many people about the place and no grist to his mill. He shared with poets and aristocrats the desire for repose and privacy.

As he was about to retire for the long shutters that by night defended and veiled his treasure from predatory hands or prying eyes, his enormous left ear became aware that feet were approaching from the end of the street touching London Road. He turned his pale blue eyes in the direction of the sound and saw coming along close to the wall the figure of a low sized stout woman, wearing a black bonnet far off her forehead. She was apparently about his own age, but except in the matter of age there was no likeness in the appearance of the two. She was dressed in shabby black stuff which had long ago forgotten to what kind of material it belonged. Her appearance was what merciful newspaper reporters describe as "decent," that is, she was not old or in tatters, or young and attractive and gaudy in apparel; her clothes were black and whole, and she was sober. She looked like an humble monthly nurse or an ideal charwoman. She carried a fish-basket in her hand. Out of this basket projected the tails of half-a-dozen red herrings. She had, apparently, once been good-looking, and was now well-favoured. She had that smooth, cheesy, oily, colourless rounded face peculiar to well-fed women of the humbler class indigenous in London.

Mr. Timmons' forehead wrinkled upwards as he recognised the visitor to Tunbridge Street. He smiled, displaying an imperfect line of long discoloured teeth.

"Good afternoon," said John Timmons in a deep vibrating voice that sounded as though it had effected its escape from the cellar through a drum.

"Afternoon," said the woman entering the store without pausing. Then nodding her head back in the direction whence she had come she asked: "Anyone?"

"No," answered Timmons, after a long and careful scrutiny of the eastern half of Tunbridge Street. "Not a soul."

"I thought I'd never get here. It's mortal hot. Are you sure there is no one after me?" said the woman,

sitting down on a broken fire-grate, in the rear of the pile of shutters standing up against the wall on the left. She began rubbing her perspiring glistening face with a handkerchief of a dun colour rolled up in a damp ball. Still she held her fish-bag in her hand.

"Certain. Which shows what bad taste the men have. Now, only for Tom I know you'd have one follower you could never shake off," said Timmons, with a gallant laugh that sounded alarmingly deeper than his speaking voice. Timmons was at his ease and leisure, and he made it a point to be always polite to ladies.

"Tom's at home," said the woman, thrusting the handkerchief into her pocket and smiling briefly and mechanically in acknowledgment of the man's compliment to her charms. "I've brought you some fish for your tea."

"Herrings," he said, bending to examine the protruding tails. "Fresh herrings, or red?" he asked in a hushed significant voice. He did not follow the woman into the store, but still stood at the threshold, so that he could see up and down the street.

"Red," she whispered hoarsely, "and as fine as ever you saw. I thought you might like them for your tea."

By this time a man with a cart turned into the street, and, it just then striking six, the door of a factory poured out a living turbid stream of bedraggled, frowsy girls, some of whom went up and some down the street, noisily talking and laughing.

"Yes. There is nothing I am so fond of for my tea as red herrings," he said, with his face half turned to the store, half to the street. "And I shall like them particularly to-night."

"Eh! Particularly to night? Are you alone? Are you going to have company at tea, Mr. Timmons?" asked the woman in a tone and manner of newly-awakened interest. She now held her fish basket with both hands in front of her fat body and resting on her shallow lap.

Timmons was standing half-a-dozen yards from her on the threshold. She could hear his voice quite plainly, notwithstanding the noise in the street and the fact that he spoke in a muffled tone. While he answered he kept his mouth partly open, and, because of so doing, spoke with

some indistinctness. It was apparent he did not want people within sight or hearing to know he was speaking. "No; I am not expecting anyone to tea, and there is no one here. I am going to have my tea all by myself. I am very busy just now. I have had a visitor to-day—a few hours ago——"

"Well," whispered the woman eagerly.

"And *I have the kettle on the boil*, and I am going to put those red herrings in it for my tea." He was looking with vacant blue eyes down the street as he spoke. He did not lay stress upon the words, "I have the kettle on the boil." He uttered them in a lower tone and more slowly than any others. The emphasis thus given them was very great. It seemed to startle the woman. She rose partly as if to go to him. She was fluttered and agreeably fluttered.

"Stay where your are," he said. He seemed to know she had attempted to rise without turning his eyes upon her. She was half hidden in the gloom of the store. No casual observer passing by would have noticed her. She was simply a black shapeless mass on the old fire-grate against a dingy dark wall in a half-light. She might easily be taken for some of Timmons's stock.

"And," she said, "he'll do it!"

"He will. He's been to Birmingham and has arranged all. They'll take every bit they can get and pay a good price—twice as much as could be got otherwise—from anyone else."

"Fine! Fine! You know, Mr. Timmons, how hard it is to find a bit now, and to get so little for it as we have been handling is very bad—heartbreaking. It takes all the spirit out of Tom."

"Where did you buy the six herrings?"

"Well," said the woman, with a smile, "I didn't exactly buy them herrings, though they are as good ones as ever you saw. You see, my little boys went to the meeting about the votes, or the Niggers, or the Gospel, or something or other, and they found the herrings growing on the trees there, ha-ha-ha."

"I know. It was a meeting for trying to get some notion of Christianity into the heads of the African Blacks. I read about it in the newspaper this morning. The

missionaries and ourselves are much beholden to the Blacks."

"It was something now I remember about the Blacks. Anyway, they're six beauties. And can you let me have a little money, Mr. Timmons, for I must hurry back to Tom with the good news."

"How is Tom? Is he on the drink?"

"No, he isn't."

"That's a bad sign. What's the matter?"

"I don't know, if it isn't going to them Christian meetings about the Blacks. It's my belief that he'll turn Christian in the end, and you know, Mr. Timmons, that won't pay *him*."

"Not at Tom's time of life. You must begin that kind of thing young. There are lots of converted—well sinners, but they don't often make bishops of even the best of them."

"Well, am I to go? What are you going to give me, Mr. Timmons? When Tom isn't in a reasonable state of drink there's no standing him. Make it as much as you can. Say a fiver for luck on the new-found-out."

"I'll give you an order on the Bank of England for a million if you like, but I can't give you more than ten thousand pounds in sovereigns, or even half sovereigns, just at this moment, even for the good of the unfortunate heathen Blacks. But here, anyway, take this just to keep you going. I haven't landed any fish myself yet."

The woman rose and he handed to her money. Then followed a long, good-humoured dialogue in which she begged for more, and he firmly, but playfully, refused her. Then she went away, and Mr. John Timmons was left once more alone.

He had taken the fish basket from the woman when giving her the money, and now carried it to the back of the store and descended with it to the cellar. He did not remain long below, but soon came trotting up the ladder, humming a dull air in a deep growl. Then he set himself briskly to work putting up the shutters, taking them out of the pile in front of the old fire-grate on which the woman had sat, carrying each one separately to the front and running it home through the slot. When all were up, he

opened the lower part of one, which hung on hinges serving as a wicket, and stepped out into the street full from end to end of the bright, warm evening sunlight.

He rubbed his forehead with the sleeve of his coat and took a leisurely survey of the street. The noisy girls from the factory had all disappeared, and the silence of evening was falling upon the place. A few men busied themselves among the carts and vans and a dull muffled sound told of the traffic in London Road. The hum of machinery had ceased, and, contrasted with the noise of an hour ago, the place was soundless.

John Timmons seemed satisfied with his inspection. He closed the wicket, and retired into the deep gloom of the store. The only light now in this place entered through holes up high in two shutters. The holes were no more than a foot square, and were protected by perforated iron plates. They were intended for ventilating not lighting the store.

Even in the thick dark air John Timmons was quite independent of light. He could have found any article in his stock blindfold. He was no sun-worshipper, nor did he pay divine honours to the moon. A good thick blinding London fog was his notion of reasonable weather. One could then do one's business, whatever it might be, without fear of bright and curious eyes.

He had told his late visitor that he had the kettle on the fire. She had brought him half-a-dozen red herrings and left them with him in a fish-basket. Now red herrings, differing in this respect from other kinds of fish, are seldom or never cooked in a kettle, and although the front of the door was closed and the only visible source of heat the two ventilators high up in the shutters, the air of the store was growing already warmer and drier, and although there was no smell of cooking there was an unmistakable smell of fire.

The owner did not seem in any great hurry to cook and taste his savoury victuals. He might have meant that the kettle was for tea merely, and had nothing to do directly with the red herrings. He fastened the wicket-door very carefully, and then slowly examined the rear of the shutters one by one, and, holding his eye close to them here and

there, tried if he could spy out, in order to ascertain if any one could spy in. Then he rested his shoulder against the middle shutter, leant his head against the panel and, having thrust his hands deeper than ever into his trousers' pockets, gave up his soul to listening.

In the meantime the fish basket, with the tails of the six red herrings sticking out, was lying on the top of the old fire-grate which had served his visitor as a seat. It had been placed here by Timmons when he took it from the woman.

A quarter of an hour the man remained thus without moving. Apparently he was satisfied at last. He stood upright upon his feet, shook himself, gazed confidently round the store and then walked to the old fire-grate. He was going to get his tea at last.

He took up the basket, drew out the wooden skewer by which it was closed, caught the herrings in a bundle and threw them behind him on the gritty earthen floor.

He opened the bag wide and peered into it. Holding it in his left hand upon his upraised thigh he thrust his right hand into it and fumbled about, bending his head down to look the better.

He was on the point of drawing something out when he suddenly paused and listened motionless.

There was the sound of approaching steps. Timmons stood as still as death.

Three soft knocks sounded upon the wicket and then, after an interval of a few seconds, two more knocks still softer.

"It's Stamer himself," cried Timmons, with an imprecation, in a muffled voice. Then he added: "What does he want? More money? Anyway, I suppose I must let him in."

He turned round, caught up the scattered red herrings, thrust them into the bag, fixed it with the skewer, and then threw it carelessly on the hob of the old grate. Then he went to the wicket, opened it without speaking, and admitted his second visitor of that evening.

When the new comer was inside the door and the bolt drawn once more, Timmons said, in a slow angry tone, "Well, Stamer, what do you want? Is a bargain a bargain?"

You were not to come here in daylight, and only in the dark when something of great consequence brought you. I gave your wife all I will give just now, if we are to go on working on the co-operative principle. What do you want?"

The low-sized, round-shouldered man, dressed in fustian and wearing two gold rings on the little finger of his left hand, said in a whisper: "The ole 'oman gev me the coin, gov'nor. I don't want no more till all's right. What I did come about is of consequence, is of the greatest consequence, gov'nor." He glanced round with furtive eyes, looking apprehensively in the dim light at everything large enough to conceal a man.

"What is it? Out with it!" said Timmons impatiently.

"You're going to see this cove to-night?"

"Yes."

"At what o'clock?"

"That's my affair," said Timmons savagely.

"I know it is Mr. Timmons, but still I'm a bit interested, too, if I understand right the co-operative principle."

"You! What are you interested in so long as you get the coin?"

"In you. I'm powerful interested in you."

"What do you mean?" asked Timmons, frowning.

"Tell me when you're going and I'll tell you."

"Midnight."

"Ah! It will be dark then!"

"What news you tell us. It generally is dark at midnight."

"Are you going to take much of the stuff with you—much of the red stuff—of the red herrings?"

Timmons drew back a pace with a start and looked at Stamer suspiciously. "Have you come to save me the trouble? Eh? Would you like to take it yourself? Eh? Did you come here to rob me? I mean to share fair. Do you want to throw up the great co-operative principle and bag all?"

Stamer's eyes winked quickly, and he answered in a tone of sorrow and reproach: "Don't talk like that, gov'nor. You know I'm a square un, I am. I'd die for you. Did I ever peach on you when I was in trouble, gov'nor? It hurts my feelings for you to talk like that! I say, don't do

it, gov'nor. You know I'm square. Tell me how much stuff are you going to take with you to-night?"

The words and manner of the man indicated extreme sincerity, and seemed to reassure Timmons. "About two pounds," he answered.

"Oh!" groaned Stamer, shaking his close-cropped head dismally.

"What is the matter with the man? Are you mad? You're not drunk. Your wife tells me you're not on the drink."

"No. I'm reforming. Drink interferes dreadful with business. It spoils a man's nerve, too. Two pounds is an awful lot."

"What are you driving at Stamer? You say you're a square man. Well, as far as I have had to do with you I have found you a square man——"

"And honest?" said Stamer pathetically.

"With me. Yes."

"No man is honest in the way of business."

"Well, well! What is the matter?" said Timmons impatiently; "I've got the kettle on and must run down. I haven't put in those herrings your old woman brought yet."

"I know. I'm sorry, gov'nor, for bothering you. I'd give my life for you. Look here, gov'nor, suppose *he* is not an honest man, like me. He isn't in our co-operative plan, you know. Suppose *he* isn't particular about how he gets hold of a bit of stuff?"

"And tried to rob me?"

"That's not what I'd mind!" He put his hand to the back of his waistband. "You know what I carry here. Suppose he carries one too?"

"You mean that he may murder me first and rob me after?"

Stamer nodded.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you, Stamer, indeed I am; but I'm not a bit afraid, not a bit. Why, he's not much over four feet, and he's a hunchback as well."

"But hunchbacks can buy tools like this, and a man's inches don't matter then," moving his hand under his coat.

"I'm not a bit afraid. Not a bit. If that's what you came

about it's all right, and now I *must* go down. The fire is low by this time, and I may as well run these out of likeness at once."

He opened the door for Stamer, who, with a doubtful shake of the head, stepped over the raised threshold and went out. As Stamer sauntered down Tunbridge Street he muttered to himself, "I'll keep my eye on this affair anyway."

When the wicket-door was closed Timmons took up the fish-basket, flung away the red herrings a second time, and descended to the cellar.

CHAPTER XVII.

DINNER AT CURZON STREET.

WHEN Oscar Leigh left Mrs. Ashton's drawing-room abruptly that afternoon, Hanbury was too much annoyed and perplexed to trust himself to speak to Dora. It was getting late. He had promised to dine in Curzon Street that evening, and would have ample opportunity after dinner of saying to Dora anything he liked. Therefore he made an excuse and a hasty exit as if to overtake Leigh. He had had however enough of the clockmaker for that day, for all his life; so when he found himself on the landing and stairs and in the hall he walked slowly, allowing time for Leigh to get out of sight before emerging from the house.

He took his way south and crossed Piccadilly at Hyde Park Corner. He had to get to his mother's house in Chester Square, to dress for dinner, and there was not much time to lose. His mother did not expect him to dine at home that day. She knew he had promised to go to Curzon Street, and was not in the house when he arrived.

He went straight to his own room in no very amiable humour. He was not at all pleased with the day. He did not think Dora had acted with prudence in persisting on going slumming in Chelsea, he was quite certain she had

not done prudently in giving Leigh their names. He considered Leigh had behaved—well, not much better than a man of his class might be expected to behave, and, worst of all and hardest of all to bear, he did not consider his own conduct had been anything like what it ought.

If he made up his mind to go in for a popular platform, he must overcome, beat down, this squeamishness which caused him to give way at unpleasant sights. Whether he did or did not adopt the popular platform he ought to do this. It was grotesque that his effectiveness in an emergency should be at the mercy of a failing which most school-girls would laugh at! It was too bad that Dora should be able to help where he became a mere encumbrance. Poor girl—but there, he must not allow himself to run off on a sentimental lead just now. He must keep his mind firm, for he must be firm with Dora this evening.

What a wonderful likeness there was between that strange girl and Dora. Yes, Miss Grace was, if possible, lovelier in face than Dora. More quiet and still mannered. She absolutely looked more of an aristocrat than Dora. It would be curious to see if her mind was like Dora's too; if, for example, she had active, vivid, democratic sympathies.

Every one who knew him told him he had a brilliant future before him. Before he got married (about which there was no great hurry as they were both young) it would be necessary for him to take up a definite position in politics. He felt he had the stuff in him out of which to make an orator, and an orator meant a statesman, and a statesman meant power, what he pleased, a coronet later in life if he and Dora cared for one. But he must select his career before marriage.

It would be very interesting to see if those two girls, so marvellously alike in appearance, were similar in aspirations. How extraordinarily alike they were. The likeness was as that man had said, stranger than his own fabulous miracle gold.

Ashton and his wife got on very well together, although they did not take the same view of public affairs. But then in this case things were different from what they

would be in his. Mrs. Ashton was an ardent politician, her husband none at all. For a politician to enter upon his public career with a young wife opposed to him would be most unwise, the beginning of disagreement at home. At first, when he met Dora, he was attracted towards her by the enthusiasm of her spirit. He had never before met so young a woman, a mere girl, with such settled faith. At that time he was not very sure how he himself thought on many of the questions which divided men. She knew no doubt or hesitancy, and she was very lovely and bright and fresh. He had thought—What a helpmate for a busy man! And then, before he had time to think much more, he had made up his mind he could not get on without Dora.

There were many cases in which wives had been the best aids and friends of illustrious politicians. It would never do for a man to have a wife who would continually throw cold water on her husband's public ardours; or, worse still, who would be actively opposed to him. Such a state could not be borne.

Dora had clearer views and more resolute convictions than he. Woman always saw more quickly and sharply than men. If he threw himself into the arms of the people she would be with him heart and soul, and he should attain a wide popularity at all events.

How on earth did that man Leigh become acquainted with that exquisite creature, Miss Grace? No wonder he called her miracle gold.

Well, it was time for him to be getting back to Curzon Street. There was to be no one at dinner but the family and himself. There would, therefore, neither before nor after, be any politics. What a relief it was to forget the worry and heat and dust of politics now and then for a while, for a little while even!

Grimsby Street was an awful place for a girl like Miss Grace to live in. Why did she live in such a horrible street? Poverty, no doubt. Poverty. What a shame! She looked as if it would suit her better to live in a better place. By heavens, what a lovely exquisite girl she was. Could that poor misshapen clock maker be in love with her? He in love? Monstrous!

Ten minutes past eight ! Not a moment to be lost.
"Hansom ! Curzon Street."

John Hanbury reached Ashton's as dinner was announced. The host greeted him with effusion. He was always glad to have some guest, and he particularly liked Hanbury. He was by no means hen-pecked, but there was between him and his wife when alone the consciousness of a truce, not the assurance of peace. Each felt the other was armed, she with many convictions, he with only one, namely, that all convictions were troublesome and more or less fraudulent. They lived together in the greatest amity. They did not agree to disagree, but they agreed not to disagree, which is a much better thing. Ashton of course guessed there was something between Dora and Hanbury, but he had no official cognizance of it yet, and therefore treated Hanbury merely as a very acceptable visitor. He liked the young man, and his position and prospects were satisfactory.

Towards the end of dinner, he said : "They tell me, Hanbury, that you brought a very remarkable character with you to-day, a sorcerer, or an astrologer, or alchemist. I thought men of that class had all turned into farriers by this time."

"I don't think Leigh has anything to do with hooves, unless hooves of the cloven kind," said Hanbury with a laugh. "If a ravenous appetite for bread confirms the graminivorous characteristic of the hoof I am afraid it is all up with poor Leigh in Mrs. Ashton's opinion."

"I found him very interesting I am sure," said Mrs. Ashton, "and I am only sorry I had not more opportunity of hearing about his wonderful clock."

"Clock ? Oh, he is a clock maker is he," said the host. "Then I did not make such a bad shot after all. He has something to do with metal ?"

"I told you, Jerry, he makes *gold*, miracle gold," said Mrs. Ashton, vivaciously.

"So you did, my dear. So you did. My penetration then in taking him for an alchemist does not seem to have been very great. I should be a first-rate man to discover America now. But I fancy if I had been born before Columbus I should not have taken the bread out of his mouth."

"Mr. Leigh told us he was not sure he would go on making this miracle gold," said Dora.

"Not go on making gold!" cried the father in astonishment, "was there ever yet a man who of his own free will gave up making gold? Why is he thinking of abandoning the mine, Dora?"

"There is so much difficulty and danger, he says, father."

"Difficulty and danger! Of course there is always difficulty in making gold; but danger—what is the danger?"

"He is liable to be blown up."

"Good heavens! for making gold? Why, what are you talking of, child? Ah! I see," with a heavy affected sigh, "he is a bachelor. If he were a married man he would stand in danger of being blown up for *not* making gold. Well, Josephine, my dear," to his wife, "you do get some very original people around you. I must say I should like to see this timid alchemist."

"If Mr. Ashton will honour his own house with his presence this day week, he will have an excellent opportunity of meeting Mr. Leigh," said Mrs. Ashton with a bow.

"My dearest Josephine, your friend Mr. Ashton, will do nothing of the kind. He will not add another to your collection of monsters."

"That's a very heartless and rude speech, father."

"And I look on it as distinctly personal," said Hanbury, "for I attend regularly."

"I have really very little to do with the matter," said Mrs. Ashton. "Mr. Leigh is Dora's thrall."

The girl coloured and looked reproachfully at her mother, and uneasily at Hanbury. It would be much more pleasant if the conversation shifted away from Leigh.

"He is going to model her for Pallas-Athena."

"Mother, the poor man did not say that."

"No; he did not *say* it, but he meant it, Dora."

"Oh, he is a sculptor, too!" cried Mr. Ashton with a laugh. "Is there any end to this prodigy's perfections and accomplishments? But, I say, Dora, seriously, I won't have any folly of that kind. I won't have you give sittings to any one."

"Oh, father! indeed you must not mind mother. She

is joking. Mr. Leigh never said or meant anything of the kind." She had grown red and very uncomfortable.

Her father sat back in his chair and said in a bantering tone, under which the note of seriousness could be heard :

" You know I am not a bigot. But I will have no professional-beauty nonsense, for three reasons : First, because professional beauties are played out ; they are no longer the rage—that reason would be sufficient with average people. Second, and more important, it isn't, and wasn't, and never can be, good form to be a professional beauty ; and third," he hesitated and looked fondly at his daughter, "and third—confound it, my girl is too good-looking to be mentioned in the same breath as any of these popular beauties."

" Bravo, sir," said Hanbury, as he got up to open the door for Mrs. Ashton and Dora, who had risen to leave the room.

When the two men were left alone, Mr. Ashton said :

" This Leigh is, I assume, one of the people ? "

" Yes," said Hanbury, who wished Leigh and all about him at the bottom of the Red Sea. " But, he is not, you know, one of the horny-handed sons of toil. He is a man of some reading, and intelligence, and education, but rather vulgar all the same."

" All right. I'm sure if he is your friend he must be an excellent fellow, my dear Hanbury ; and if you put him up for this constituency, I'll vote for him, no matter what his principles are. That is," he added thoughtfully, " if I have a vote. But for the present, my dear fellow, I'll tell you what we'll do with him—we'll let him alone—that is, if you don't mind doing so."

" I shall do so with great pleasure. I have had quite enough of him for to-day," said the other, greatly relieved.

" All right. Hanbury, I shall let you into a secret. I don't care for people who aren't nice. I prefer nice people. I like people like my wife and Dora, and your mother and yourself."

" I am sure, sir, you are very good to include me in your list."

" And I don't care at all for people who aren't nice, you

know. I don't care at all for the poor. When they aren't objectionable they are an awful bore. For the life of me I can't make out what reasonable men and women see in the people. I don't object to them. I suppose they are necessary, and have their uses and functions, and all that; but if they have, why interfere with them? Lots of fellows I know go in for the poor partly out of fun, and for a change, and partly to catch votes. All right. But these fellows don't emigrate from the West and live in the East End. If they did, they'd go mad my boy—they'd go mad. Anyway, I should. You know, I hate politics, and never talk politics. If I were a very rich man, I'd buy the whole of the Isle of Wight and banish all the poor from it, and live there the whole of my life, and drown any of the poor that dared to land on it. I wouldn't tell this to any soul in the world except you. I know I can trust you to keep my secret. Mind, I don't object to my wife and Dora doing what they like in such affairs; in fact, I rather like it, for it keeps matters smooth for me. This is, I know, a horribly wicked profession of faith; but I make it to you alone. I know that, according to poetic justice, I ought to be killed on my way to the club by a coster's run-away ass or the horse in a pauper's hearse, but I don't think I shall oblige poetic justice by falling into or under such a scheme—I *am always very careful at crossings*. If you are *very* careful at crossings, I don't see how poetic justice is to get at you. There, let us drop this ghastly subject now."

The conversation then wandered off into general ways, and lost its particular and personal character.

Hanbury had never heard from any other man so cynical a speech as Ashton's, and he was considerably shocked and pained by it. His own convictions were few. He was himself in that condition of aimless aspiring enthusiasm proper to ardent youth, when youth has just begun to think conscientiously with a view to action. He could see nothing very clearly, but everything he did see shone fiercely in splendid clouds. This low view of life, this mere animal craving for peace and comfort, for nice things and nice people, was abhorrent to him. If in the early part of that day he had spoken slightly of the people, it was out of no cynical indifference, but from the pain and worry caused to him-

self in his own mind by his opinions not being ascertained and fixed.

If he hesitated to throw his fortunes into the scale with the more advanced politicians, it was from no mean or sordid motive. He could not decide within himself which class had the more worthy moral sanction. If the present rate of progress was too slow, then those who sought to retard it were villains; if too quick, those who tried to accelerate it were fools. Whatever else he might be, he was not corrupt.

What Mr. Ashton said had a great influence on young Hanbury. It aroused his suspicions. Could it be that most of those who sought to check the car of progress harboured such vile and unmanly sentiments as his host had uttered in confidence? Could it be that Ashton was more courageous because he had nothing tangible to lose by candour? Could it be that if he himself espoused the side of the slower movers, it would be assumed he harboured opinions such as those Ashton had just uttered? The mere supposition was an outrage. It was a suspicion under which he would not willingly consent to rest one hour. This cold-blooded declaration of Ashton's had done more towards the making up of his mind than all he had heard and read since he turned his attention to public affairs.

Yes, he would decide to throw himself body and soul among the more progressive party. He would espouse the principles of the extreme Liberals. Then there would be no more wavering or doubt, and no question of discord in politics would arise between Dora and himself. They would have but the one creed in public affairs. Their opinions would not merely resemble the principles of one another—they would be identical.

Mr. Ashton and his guest did not remain long in the dining-room. Hanbury was not treated with ceremony in that house, so Mr. Ashton merely looked into the drawing-room for a few minutes, and then went off to his club. Mrs. Ashton had letters to write, and retired shortly after him to the study, leaving Dora alone with John Hanbury.

He thought that in order to keep a good understanding there was nothing like establishing a clear understanding.

In order to ensure complete pleasantness in the future, all things that might lead to unpleasantness ought to be removed from the past and present. The best way of treating a nettle, when you have to touch it, is to seize it boldly.

He was in love with Dora, and he was resolved to marry her. That very evening he was going to ask her if she did not think the best thing they could do would be to get married soon, at once. He had made up his mind to adopt the popular platform, and then, of course, his way would be clear. Up to this he had been regarded as almost committed to the more cautious side, to the Conservative party, the Democratic Conservative party. By declaring himself now for the advanced party, he should be greeted by it as a convert, and no doubt he could find a willing constituency at the next general election.

That was all settled, all plain sailing. He was a young man, and in love; but it must be observed he was not also a fool. He would show all who knew him he was no fool. The life he now saw before him was simple, straightforward, pleasant. Dora was beautiful, and good, and clever, and in his part of popular politician would be an ornament by his side, and, perhaps, a help to him in his career. She was a dear girl, and would adorn any position to which he might aspire, to which he might climb.

Yes, he was a young man, he was in love, but he was no fool, and he knew that Dora would think less of him, would think nothing at all of him, if she believed him to be a fool. Between lovers there ought to be confidence, freedom of speech. She would esteem him all the more for being candid and plain with her. What was this he had to say to her? Oh, yes, he recollected——

Dora and he were sitting close to one another in the window-place where Leigh and he had found her earlier. The long June day had faded into luminous night; the blinds had not been lowered, or the lamps in the room lit. The long, soft, cool, blue midsummer twilight was still and delicious for any people, but especially for lovers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE DARK.

"WELL, Dora," he began, "this has been an exciting day."

"Yes," she said softly, and added with tender anxiety, "I hope you have quite recovered? I hope you do not feel any bad effects of—of—of—what happened to you, Jack?" She did not know how he would take even this solicitous reference to his fainting.

"I feel quite well, dearest. Do not let us talk of that affair again. That cabman brought you quite safe?"

"Oh, quite safe," she said gently. "Tell me what happened after you left me?" It gratified her that he thought of her. She had accused him of selfishness, now he was showing that his first thought was of her. With the self-sacrificing spirit of her sex she was satisfied with a little sympathy on her own account. She wanted to give him all her sympathy now. "Of course, I know you found Mr. Leigh. What an extraordinary man. Is he a little mad, do you think?"

"A good deal mad, I fancy, with conceit," he said impatiently. Leigh, personally, had been a misfortune, and now the memory of him was exasperating and a bore.

The ungentleness of the answer jarred upon the girl's heart. Leigh had suffered such miserable wrongs at the hand of fate, that surely he was deserving of all consideration and compassion. His bodily disabilities made him more helpless and piteous than a lonely, deserted child. "Tell me all," she said. "It was so good of you to bring him here. I felt quite proud of you when I saw you coming with him. Many men would have been afraid to trust so uncouth a man with so unpleasant a secret into this room of a Thursday." She spoke to encourage Hanbury, by anticipating in part his account of the generous thing she fancied he had done.

He twisted and turned uneasily on his chair. Whatever Dora or anyone else might think of him, he was not going

to pose in plumes that were not his by right. It was very gratifying in one sense that she should give him credit for such extravagant, such Quixotic good nature; but she must not be allowed to run away with the story.

"The fact is, Dora," said he in a tone of deliberation and dissatisfaction, "I did not bring him here of my own free will. Indeed, I do not know how you could imagine I would invite such a man. I found him contemplating a paragraph for the papers, and he promised he would say nothing about what had occurred if I would introduce him to you. He seems to have conceived a romantic interest in you, because of your likeness to some one he knows." Later this evening he should tell her all about this "some one."

"I see," she said, her spirits declining. It was not out of good nature or generosity, but cowardice, moral cowardice, Jack had brought Leigh. The principle which had made Jack flee from Welbeck Place after sending Leigh for the cab, and then made him fly back there again when he learned that the little man knew their names, had forced him against his will to bring Leigh to her mother's At home. She was in the most indulgent and forgiving of humours, but—but—but—"Oh Jack, I am so sorry!" was all she could think of saying. She was sorry for him, for John Hanbury, who either was not, or would not be, too big to be troubled by such paltry fears, and irritated by such paltry annoyances.

"Sorry! Sorry for what?" he cried. He gathered from her tone and manner that she was not speaking out fully. He could not guess what was in her mind. He had a little lecture or exhortation prepared to deliver her, and in addition to the unpleasantness of not knowing exactly what she meant when she said she was sorry, he had the confusing and exasperating sense of repression, of not being able to get on the ground he intended occupying.

She did not speak for a while. She was looking out into the dark blue air of the street. She had formed a high ideal of what he, her hero, ought to be, nearly was. But now and then, often, he did not reach the standard she had raised. Her ideal was the man of noble thought certainly, but he should still more be the man of noble action. She

would have laid down her life freely in what she believed to be a good cause, and to her mind the noblest cause in which a woman could die would be for a noble man whom she loved. She believed the place of woman was by the side of man, not independent of man. She held that in all matters man and wife should be, to use words that had been employed in acts, to think of which rent her heart with agony, one and undivisible. She regarded strong-minded women as wrong-minded women. Strength and magnanimity were the attributes of men; love and gentleness of women. She wanted this man beside her to shine bright in the eyes of men by reason of his great and rare gifts. No one doubted his abilities as a man; she wanted him to treat his abilities as only the foundation of his character. She wanted not only to know that he possessed great gifts and precious powers, but to feel as well that he was fit to be a god. She yearned to pass her life by the side of a man who could force the world to listen to his words, and fill the one pedestal in her earthly temple. She wanted him to be a hero and a conqueror in the face of the world, and she wanted to give him the whole loyal worship of her woman's heart, that she might live always in the only attitude which rests a woman's spirit, the attitude of giving service of the hand and largess of the heart, and homage of the soul. She wanted to give this man all her heart and soul unceasingly. To give him everything that was hers to give, under Heaven.

It was necessary to make some reply, and she had none ready. In the pause she had not been thinking. She had been seeing visions, dreaming dreams, from which occupations thought is always absent.

He became still more uneasy. Her hand was in his. He pressed it slightly, to recall her attention to him, "What are you sorry for, Dora? What are you thinking of, dear? Are you angry with me still?"

She started without turning her eyes away from the blue duskness of the street, and in a tone of wonderful tenderness and sadness, said:

"I don't know exactly what I was thinking of, Jack. The evening is so fresh and still it is not necessary for one to think. Angry with you, dear! Oh, no! Oh, no! Angry with you for what?"

"About the harsh words I said of Leigh. It seems to me your manner changed the moment I mentioned his name. Let us not speak of him any more this evening."

He pressed her hand, and stole his arm round her waist. She returned the pressure of his hand, but did not turn her eyes inward from the still street.

"But why should we not speak of him, Jack?"

"Because, dear, we are here together, and we are much more interesting to one another than he can be to either."

"Yes, dear, in a way more interesting to one another than all the world besides; but in another way not nearly so interesting as this poor clock maker," she said slowly, in a dreamy voice.

"I own," he said testily, "I do not see the matter as you put it. How can he, a mere stranger, and a mere stranger who might have done us harm, be more interesting in any light than we are to one another?" He was a man, and thought as the average man thinks, of getting not giving. He was here alone with this beautiful girl who was to be his wife one day, and his chief concern was to get the most pleasure out of her presence by his side, the sound of her voice, the assurance of her love, the contemplation of their future happiness, the sense that she was his very own, that she would be bound to render him obedience which would, of course, never be exacted, and that he was about to lay before her his views of what her conduct ought to be, of where she had declined to accept his advice with regard to their walk of that day, and above all of his determination as to his future course, and the desirableness of their early marriage. He wanted in fact to get her disapproval of the expedition which had led to the unpleasantness of that day, her disapproval of her venturesome over-ruling of his judgment and her approval of all his plans for the future. He did not state his position thus. He simply wanted certain things, and never thought of referring his wants to any principle.

"In this way," she answered softly, "all about us is happy and assured. For ourselves we have everything that is necessary not only for mere life, but for enjoyment. The things we lack are only luxuries——"

"Luxuries!" he cried. "Do you consider the ardours

of a public life luxuries? Do you not yet know me better than to believe I would lead an existence of idle pleasure? Why, a public man now-a-days works harder than a blacksmith, and generally without necessity or reward!" He spoke indignantly. She had attacked his class, she was showing indifference to the usefulness and disinterestedness of his order.

Neither his words nor his manner aroused her. "I am not at all forgetting what you speak of. I am thinking, Jack dear, of things more common and essential than fame or the reputation of a benefactor to man. You know I hold that the first sphere of woman is her home. People like us are rarely grateful for food or shelter, or even health, and no people of any kind are grateful for the air they breathe." She paused and sighed. She did not finish her thought in words.

"Well," said he, withdrawing his arm from her waist and taking a chair opposite her in the window-place, "how does this apply? Of course, when you realize the fact that you could not live without air, you are grateful for it. I don't see what you are driving at."

"I cannot help thinking of the man and pitying him. He will go into his grave having missed nearly everything in the world."

"Why, the man has enough conceit to make a battalion of Guards happy. He is a greater man in his own opinion than the Premier, the Lord Chancellor and the Commander-in-Chief rolled into one."

"But even if he is, Jack, that is not all. The Premier and the Lord Chancellor and the Commander-in-Chief, over and above their great successes and fame, have the comforts ordinary men enjoy as well. They are not afflicted in their forms as he is. You say he is interested in me because I remind him of some one. How must it be with an ordinary human heart beating in such a body? Would it not be better for such a man to be born blind than to find his Pallas-Athena, as he calls her?"

The eyes of the girl could not be seen in the darkness of the room; they were full of tears and there were tears in her voice.

Hanbury started, he could not tell why. He exclaimed:

"Good Heavens, Dora! you do not mean to tell me that you feel seriously concerned in the love affairs, if there are such things, of this man?"

"No, dear, but I am saddened when I think of them. However absurd it may seem, I cannot help believing this finding of his ideal must be a dreadful misfortune to him."

"Even if you yourself were the ideal, Dora?"

"Even so. But you tell me he had found it before he came here. Of course, dear my mind is influenced only for the moment by the thought of him and his affairs; but ever since I heard him speak, grotesque as it may seem, my heart has been feeling for him with his poor deformed body and his elaborate gallantry of manner and his Pallas-Athena."

Now was the time to tell Dora of this Miss Grace, but it seemed to him the story was too long for so late an hour, and that it could be told with pleasanter effect when Dora was less exercised about the dwarf. The conversation was too sentimental for him. He had matters of practical moment to speak about, and this subject obstinately blocked the way. The best thing for him to do was to give the matter an every-day aspect at once. "Well, Dora, in any case, Leigh isn't in the first glory of youth, and if he ever does fall in love and marry, it will, I am sure, be no Pallas-Athena, but a barmaid, with practical views, and a notion of keeping an hotel, or something of that kind."

"But how do you think a man with his imagination, his Pallas-Athena, and his incomparable clock and his miracle gold——?"

"Which is nonsense, of course. You don't mean that you believe in transmutation in this end of the nineteenth century?" he said impatiently.

"I do not know. I am not scientific. I suppose more wonderful things have been done. If there ever was a time for making gold it is now. All the wonders that poets dreamed of long ago are coming true in prose to-day. Why not the great dream of the alchemists too? At all events, the fancies are bad for him. Suppose there is to be no Pallas-Athena or wonderful clock or miracle gold in his life, what is there left to him? It seems to me he is all the poorer for his delusions. Jack, I will not try to disguise it.

I am intensely interested in this poor clockmaker, this mad visionary, if you prefer to call him that."

This was not at all the kind of preface Hanbury wanted to the communications he had to make to her. He felt disconcerted, clumsy, petulant. "I have been so unfortunate as to introduce the cause of all this anxiety to you. It would have been much better for every sake I had not gone back and met the man the second time, much better I should cut a ridiculous figure before all the town to-morrow!" He was growing angry as his speech went on. His own words were inflaming his mind by the implication of his wrongs.

She placed her hand gently on his, and said in a reproachful voice, a voice quite different from the meditative tones in which she had been speaking, "Jack, I did not mean that. You know I did not mean that. Why do you reproach me with thoughts you ought to know I could not harbour?" She had turned in from the window, and was looking at him opposite her in the dim darkness. She was now fully alive to his presence and everything around her.

"No doubt," he said bitterly, "I am ungenerous to you. I am unjust. I am afraid Dora, I am but an ill-conditioned beast——"

"Jack, that is the most unjust thing you could possibly say to me. In saying it you seem to use words you fancy I would like to use, only I am not brave enough."

"I know you are brave enough for anything. I know it is I who am the coward."

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

"You told me so yourself to-day. You cannot say I am putting that word into your mouth." He was taking fire.

"Have you no mercy for me, Jack; my Jack?"

"You told me with your own lips I had no thought but of my miserable self in the miserable thing that happened."

"Jack, have you no pity? My Jack, have you no pity for your own Dora?" She seized his hands with both her own. There were no tears in her voice now, there was the blood of her heart.

"Ay, and when I, yielding to my cowardly heart——"

"Oh God!" She took her hands away from his and covered her face with them.

"—And brought that man here as the price of his silence, you—knowing the chicken-livered creature I am—absolutely asked him to come next week. To come here, where his presence is to cure me of my cowardice or accustom me to the peril of ridicule which you know I hate worse than death!" He was blazing now.

"Good night."

"After this, how can I be sure that you may not consider it salutary to betray me yourself?" He was mad.

"Good-bye, Jack. Oh God, my heart is broken!"

"I tell you——" He turned around. He was alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. HANBURY.

JOHN HANBURY had reached the end of the street before he knew where he was. He had no memory of how he got out of the house. No doubt he had behaved like a madman, and he had been temporarily insane. He must have snatched his hat in the hall, but he was without his overcoat.

His heart was beating violently, and his head was burning hot. He must have run down the street. There was no one in view. He had only a whirling and flashing memory of the last few minutes with Dora. His temper had completely mastered him, and he must have spoken and behaved like a maniac. He must have behaved like a maniac in her presence—to her!

Now and then, in the heat of public speaking, he had been carried beyond himself, beyond the power of memory afterwards, but never in his life had impetuosity betrayed him in private life until now. What sort of a lunatic must he have been to sin for the first time before the only woman he ever cared for? The woman he had asked to be his wife?

The excitement of the day had been too much for him, and he had broken down in the end. He had taken only one glass of wine at dinner, and only coffee after. Some-

thing must have gone wrong with his brain. Could it be this fainting which had overtaken him to-day, and twice before, indicated some flaw or weakness in the brain? It would have been better he had died in that accursed slum than come back to consciousness and done this. Then he had fainted like a woman, and behaved like a coward. Now he had acted like a cad! He had abused, reviled the woman he professed to love, and who he knew loved him! He dared say he had not struck her! It was, perhaps, a pity he had not struck her, for if he had he should be either now in the hands of the police, or shot by her father! It was a good job the girl had a father to shoot him. If he was called out he should fire in the air, and if Ashton demanded another shot and missed him, he should reserve his fire and blow his own brains out. When a man did a thing like this, there was only one reflection that could ease his intolerable agony of reproach—he could blow out his brains and rid the world of a cowardly cad.

From the moment he found himself at the end of Curzon Street until he reached his mother's house in Chester Square, he walked rapidly, mechanically, and without design. When he saw the door before him he was staggered for a moment.

"How did I come here?" he asked himself, as he opened it with a latch-key. He could not answer the question. He saw in a dim way that it would be interesting to imagine how a man in possession of his faculties walked a whole mile without knowing why he walked or remembering anything by the way. But at present—Pooh! pooh!

"Mrs. Hanbury wishes to see you, sir, in her own room, if you please," said a servant, who had heard him come in and appeared while he was hanging up his hat.

"Very well. Tell her I shall be with her in a few minutes."

His mother's room adjoined her sleeping chamber, and was opposite his own bedroom on the second floor.

He turned into the long dining-room to his right. There was here a dim light burning, the windows were wide open, the place cool and still.

He shut the door behind him and began pacing quickly

up and down. It was necessary in some way to collect his mind before meeting his mother.

He shut his fists hard against his chest and breathed hard as he walked. By his breathing he judged he must have run part of the way from Curzon Street.

The perspiration was trickling down his forehead. He held his head up high; he felt as though there was a tight hand round his throat. He thrust his fingers inside his collar and tried to ease his neck.

"This is absurd," he said aloud at last. But what it was that he felt to be absurd he did not know.

"The heat is suffocating one!" he said in a short time, and tore again at his shirt, loosing his necktie and rumpling his collar.

"I am choking for air!" he cried, and tried to fling the windows higher up, but they were both as high as they could go.

"My throat is cracking!" he cried huskily, and looking round with blazing eyes through the dim room saw a caraffa on the side-board. He poured out a glass of water and swallowed the water at a draught. "Oh, that is much better," he said with a smile, and resumed his walk up and down the long room at a lessened rate. "Let me think," he said; "let me think if I can."

He clasped his hands behind his back and leaned his head on one side, his attitude when designing the plan of a speech or musing upon the parts of it.

The water he had swallowed and the slackened pace and the posture of reflection, tended to cool him and bring his mind into condition for harmonious working.

"Let me treat the matter," he whispered, "as though I were only a friend, and had come here to state my case and implore advice. How does the matter stand exactly? Let us look at the facts, the simple facts first."

His pace became slower and slower. His face ceased to work and lost the flushed and wild appearance. Gradually his head rose erect and stood back upon his neck. His eyes lit up with the flashes of reason. They no longer blazed with the flame of chaotic despair. He unclasped his hands and began to gesticulate. He ceased to be the self-convicted culprit, and became the argumentative con-

tender before the court. He had ceased to do his worst against the accused and was exercising all his faculties to compel an acquittal.

Presently his manner changed. He had adduced all his reasons and knit them together in his argument. Now he was beginning to appeal to the feelings of the man on the bench and the men in the box. His head was no longer erect, his gestures no longer combative. He was asking them to remember the circumstances of the case. He was painting a picture of himself. He appealed to their finer natures, and begged them not to condemn this young man, who by the nature of the great art, the noble art of oratory, to which he had devoted much study and in which he had had some successful practice, lived always in a state of exalted sentiment and sensations. This young man was more likely than others of his years to be overborne and carried away by emotions which would not disturb the equanimity of another man. His nature was excitable, and he had the ready, in this case the fatally ready, command of words belonging to men who had trained themselves for public speaking.

Here the scene became so real to his mind that unknown to himself he broke out into speech :

"Gentlemen, I know he may not be excused wholly. I will not ask you to say he is not to blame. I will not dare to say I think he behaved as a considerate and thoughtful man. But, gentlemen, though you cannot approve his conduct, you will not, oh, I pray you, do not take away from him the reputation he holds dearer than life, the reputation of being a sincere man and a gentleman. Amerce him in any penalty you please short of denying him the reputation of being earnest and high-minded and——" He paused. Tears for the spectacle of himself were in his eyes. His voice was shaken by the intensity of his pity for himself.

"John," said a soft voice behind him.

He turned quickly round. A tall, slender woman, with calm, clear face and snow-white hair, was standing in the room.

"Mother ! I did not hear you come in."

"I hope I did not break in disastrously. It is late. I

wanted to see you for a few minutes before I went to bed. I did not like to speak until you stopped."

He had gone to her and put his arm round her waist and kissed her smooth white hair above her smooth, pure forehead. "Mother," he said, in a low, soft, musical and infinitely tender voice, "I am sorry I kept you waiting for me. I was going to you in a moment, dear."

There was none of the art of the orator in these words, or in the exquisitely tender flexions of the voice. But the heart of the man was in the tones of his voice for his mother.

She looked at him in the dim light and saw his disordered collar and tie, but put that down to excitement caused by his rehearsal.

He led her gently to a chair and took one in front of her by the side of the dining-table. He took her thin, white hand in both his own and looked into her calm, beautiful face, radiant with that tranquil light of maternal love justified and fulfilled.

"You have something to tell me, mother? Something pleasant, I hope, about yourself." He had never spoken in a voice of such unreckoning love to Dora in all their meetings and partings. It was the broad, rich, even sound of a river that is always flowing in one direction and always full, not the tinkle of a capricious fountain or the tempestuous rush of a torrent at the mercy of exhaustion or drought.

"I have, my son. It does not concern me, or if it does, but indirectly. Indeed, I do not know. It has to do with you, dear." They, like sweethearts, called one another "dear," because they were inexpressibly dear to one another.

"With me, mother? And how?" John Hanbury was not a handsome man, but when he smiled at his slender, grey-haired mother, and patted her delicate white thin hands with his own large and brown, there was more than physical beauty in his looks, there was a subjugating, an intoxicating rapture, and all-completed prostration of his soul before the mother he worshipped.

"I do not know exactly, John. Your father gave me in trust for you, as you know, a paper, which I was not to give to you except at some great crisis of your life. If no harm

of any particular moment threatened you until you were thirty, you were never to see this paper."

"I know," he said. "I was only seventeen then—not launched in the world—and he thought I might, when I came of age, and got my two thousand a-year, plunge into dissipation, and take to racing or backing horses, or cards, or something of that kind. Well, mother, I hope you are not uneasy about me on those scores? This paper is no doubt one of extremely good advice from an excellent father to a young son. I am sure I will read the paper with all the respect I owe to any words he may have left for my guidance. You do not think, mother, I am now likely to give way to any of those temptations?"

She shook her small head gravely.

"I do not fear you will give way to the ordinary temptations of youth, John. I know you too well to dread anything of the kind. I don't think the paper your father left me for you refers to the ordinary danger in a young man's path."

"Then you must believe it has to do with unusual dangers, and you must believe I am now threatened by some unusual dangers?" said he with a start. He had been threatened by a very uncommon danger that day, the danger of being made a laughing-stock for the whole town, but such a misfortune could never have been contemplated by his father. Compared with the importance of a message from his dead father, how poor and insignificant seemed his fears of the early part of this day.

"I do not know. I am not sure. Something out of the common must be in your case, my dear child." What a luxury of pride and delight to think the tall, powerful, stalwart, clever man, was her child, had been a little helpless baby lying in her lap, pressed close to her heart! "When your father died you were in his opinion too young, I dare say, to be taken into his confidence. He often told me he would leave a paper for you, and that I was not to give it you until you were between twenty-one and thirty (if I lived), and that I was only to give it to you in case you showed any very strong leaning towards politics or a public life."

The son smiled, and threw himself back in his chair. He felt greatly relieved. He knew his father had always

shown a morbid horror of politics, and had always tried to impress upon him the emptiness of public honours and distinctions. Why, his father never said. The son distinctly remembered how tremulously excited the old and ailing man had been at every rumour of ambitious scheming abroad, particularly how he garrulously condemned the ceaseless scheming for the throne of France then perplexing the political world. He had often pointed out to his young son the folly of the Legitimists and the Orleanists and the Napoleons, until once John had said, "Why, sir, you are as emphatic to me in this matter as if I myself were a pretender!" Upon which his father had said, "Hush! Hush! my boy. You must not jest about such matters. Idle, the idlest, pretensions of the kind have often caused oceans of bloodshed." Upon which John had smiled in secret to note how his father's cherished horror had carried him so far as to caution him, John Hanbury, member of a simple English household, against aspiring to the kingly or imperial throne of the Tuileries!

"You do not think, mother," he said gaily, "that I am going to buy a tame eagle, and hire a fishing boat and take France?"

She smiled sadly, remembering her husband's dread of lofty aspirants. "No," she said, "I think, if your father were alive now, he would see as little need of cautioning you against becoming a pretender to the throne of France as of keeping out of dissipation. But he told me if ever you showed signs of plunging into politics I was to give you the paper. I left it in my room, thinking we might both sit there, not fancying we should have our chat here. I shall give it to you as you go to your room."

"And you have no clue to what the paper contains?" he asked pleasantly.

"No," she answered with hesitancy and a thoughtful lowering of her eyes. "You remember, at that time—I mean as a boy and lad—you were a fierce Radical."

"Oh, more than that! I was a Republican, a Socialist, a Nihilist, I think. A regular out-and-out Fire-eater, Iconoclast, Destructionist, I think," the young man laughed, throwing himself back in his chair and enjoying the memory of his youthful thoroughness.

"And your father took no part whatever in politics, seemed to dread the mention of them. He was at heart, I think, an aristocrat."

"And married the daughter of Sir Ralph Preston, whose family goes back centuries before the Plantagenets, and to whom a baronetcy is like a mere Brummagem medal on the breast of a Pharaoh."

Mrs. Hanbury shook her head deprecatingly and smiled, "I am afraid you are as ardent in your estimate of my family pretensions to lineage as you were long ago in your hatred of kings and princes."

"But I have always been true to you, mother!" he said in that wonderful, irresistible, meltingly affectionate voice; he took her hand and kissed it reverentially.

"Yes, my son. Always." As his head was bent over her hand she laid her hand on his thick dark curly hair.

"My mother," he murmured, when he felt her touch.

Her eyes filled and shone with tears. She made an effort, commanded herself, and as her son sat back on his chair, went on: "You know when your father went into business there was no necessity of a money kind for his doing so. The Hanburys have had plenty of money always, never lands, as far as I know, but money always. They were not a very old family as far as I have heard. This was a point on which your father was reticent. At all events he went into business in the City, as you are aware, and there made a second fortune."

"Well, mother, I am not at all ashamed of our connection with business or the City," said the young man pleasantly.

"Nor am I, John, as you know. When I married your father, none of my people said, at all events to me, that I disgraced my family or degraded my blood. Your father was in business in Fenchurch Street then. My family had known your father all his life. Our marriage was one purely of inclination, and was most happy. Your father was a simple, intelligent, kind-hearted gentleman, John, and as good a husband and father as ever breathed."

"Indeed, mother, I am quite sure of that. I still feel raw and cold without him," said the young man gravely.

"And I shall never get over his loss. I never forget it

for one hour of any day. But I am growing talkative in my age like all old people," she said, drawing herself up and laughing faintly. "I am sure I have no reason for saying it, but I fancy the paper your father left with me for you, is in some way connected with the business, or the reason which made him go into business. He gave it to me a few days before he died, and when he knew he was dying. He gave it to me after saying a great deal to me about business, after arranging his other business affairs. He said he did not like you to take so much interest in politics, but that he supposed he must not try to foretell your future. That there was such a thing as going too far in any cause, and that if ever you showed any disposition to put your extreme views in practice, I was to give you this paper. 'In fact, Amy,' said he, 'if our dear boy goes into public life at the popular side, give him this paper; it may be the means of moderating his ardour; but do not give it to him until he is over twenty-one. He will have, I think, no need of it if he keeps quiet until he is thirty. If his mind takes the other bend and he shows any sympathy with any reactionary party in Europe, any party that wants to unsettle things as they now are, destroy this on your peril. If you think he is devoted only to English Radicalism, give him the paper; if he mixes himself up with any Republican party on the Continent, give him the paper. But if he shows sympathy with any pretender on the Continent, *burn the paper, Amy, as you love your boy, and bury the ashes of it too.*' Those were his very words. What they mean or refer to I do not know." Her face had grown paler.

"And you never read the paper?"

"No. Nor have I the least clue to its contents. I only know that your father was a sensible man, and attached great importance to it. If you come I will give it to you now."

They both rose and left the dining-room together. As they went up-stairs she said:

"I am aware for some time you have not been quite certain as to the side you would throw in your lot with. I don't think your father ever contemplated such a situation, and it seems to me that if this paper is to be of any use to you it must be of most use when you are wavering."

"But I am no longer wavering. I have decided to throw in my lot with the advanced party."

"When did you make up your mind?"

"To-day."

"Oh, you dined at Curzon Street. And have you arranged about your marriage with dear Dora? No new daughter was ever so welcome as she will be to me. Has the time been fixed?"

He started. "No, not exactly, mother." He had forgotten for the past quarter of an hour all about the quarrel or scene with Dora. He flushed crimson, and then grew dusky white. He seized the balustrade for a moment to steady himself. His mother was walking in front, and could not see the signs of his agitation.

He recovered himself instantly.

She judged by his tone that her question had not been well-timed. With the intention of getting away as far as possible from the thought of Dora, or marriage, she said, turning round upon him with a smile as she opened her boudoir door, "By the way, who was that admirable paragon whose panegyric you were pronouncing in the dining-room when I came in?"

He laughed uneasily and did not meet her eyes. "An acquaintance of mine, a poor devil who has got himself into serious trouble."

"A friend of yours, John, in serious trouble."

"Not a friend, mother, an acquaintance of mine."

"Do I know him, John?"

"No, mother. Not in the least. I should be very sorry you did. I hope you may never know him."

For the second time in a minute Mrs. Hanbury felt that she had asked an ill-timed question.

She handed him the paper of which she had spoken. He said good-night to her, and as the clock on the lower lobby was striking midnight he entered his own room.

CHAPTER XX.

JOHN HANBURY ALONE.

WHEN John Hanbury closed and locked the door of his own room and threw himself into an old easy chair, he felt first an overwhelming sense of relief. A day of many exciting and unpleasant events was over, and he was encompassed by the security of his home and envired closely by the privacy of his own sleeping chamber. No one uninvited would enter by the outer door of the house; no one could enter this room without his absolute permission. He was secure against the annoyance or intrusion of people. Here he could rest and be safe. Here he was protected against even himself, for he could not make himself ridiculous or commit himself when alone. All trials of great agony spring from what we conceive to be our relations with others. Beyond physical pains and pleasures, which are few and unimportant in life, we owe all our joys and sorrows to what others think or say of us. Even in the most abstracted spiritual natures the anger of Heaven is more intolerable to anticipate than the torture of Hell.

John Hanbury's room was in the back of the house. Here, as in the dining-room, the window was wide open. The stars were dull in the misty midsummer sky. Now and then came the muffled rattle of a distant cab, now and then the banging of doors, now and then the sounds of shooting locks and bolts as servants fastened up the rears of houses for the night. Beyond these sounds there was none, and these came so seldom and so dulled by distance, and with intervals so increasing in length that they seemed like the drowsy muttering of the vast city as it moved heavily seeking ease and sleep.

For a while Hanbury sat without stirring. He still held in his hand the paper his mother had given him. He knew he had not escaped the battle. He was merely reposing between the fights. He sat with his head drooped low upon his chest, his arms lying listlessly by his side, his

legs stretched out. This was the first rest of body or mind he had had that day, but, as in a sleep obtained from narcotics, while it gave him physical relief his mind was gaining no freshness.

At length Hanbury shook himself, shuddered and rose. The light was not fully up. He left his window open from the bottom all night. He went to it, pulled up the blind and sat down on the low window-frame. He put his hand on the stone window-sill, and leaning forward looked below.

Here the silence was not so deep or monotonous as in the room with the blind down. There arose sounds, faint sounds of music from the backs of houses where entertainments were being given, now and then voices and laughter could be heard indistinctly. In many of the windows shone lights. No suggestion of tumult or trouble came from any side or from the sky above. On earth spread a peaceful heaven of man's making and man's keeping; above a peaceful heaven of God's will.

Here was the largest, and richest, and most powerful, and most civilized city of all time, lying round the feet of a stupendous goddess of liberty, whose statue had been reared by wisdom borrowed from all the ages of the history of man. This was the heart of the colossal nation whose vital blood flowed in every clime.

Here were powers capable of beneficent application lying ready to the hand of every strength. To be here and able was to have the key-board of the most gigantic organ ever devised by human mind open to one's touch.

Here all creeds were free, all thoughts were free, all words were free, all men were free. There was no slavery of the soul or the person. Here, the leader of the people was the ruler of the state. The people made the laws, and the King saw that the laws were obeyed.

Each man of the people was a monarch who deputed his regal powers to the King.

An hereditary sovereign was the best, better a thousand times than elected King.

In this country were no plots and schemings about succession. Here the King's son came to the throne under the will of the people. This country was never disturbed

by struggles to get a good ruler. This country always had a good ruler, that is, the will of the people.

What a miserable spectacle France, great France, chivalric France, presented now! How many pretenders were there to the throne?—to the presidential chair? There were the Legitimists, and the Orleanists, and the Napoleons, two branches of Napoleons, and a dozen aspirants to the presidency! How miserable! What waste of vigour and dignity.

Yes, he was glad he had made up his mind. He would devote himself, body and soul, to the sovereign people under the consitutional sovereign.

He would be as advanced as any man short of revolution, short of violence. His motto should be All things for the people under the people's King.

No doubt his mother's talk to him in the dining-room had set him off on such currents of thought. His mother's talk in the dining-room—by the way, he had not yet looked at the paper she had given him.

He pulled down the blind, turned up the lights over the mantel, and standing with his back to the chimney-piece, examined the packet in his hand.

It was a large envelope, tied in a very elaborate manner, and the string was sealed in three places at the back. On the front, under the string, he read his own name in his father's well-known large legible writing. He cut the string and the envelope, and drew out of the latter a long narrow parcel. This he opened, and found to consist of half-a-dozen sheets of brief-paper closely covered on both sides with the large legible writing of his father. The paper was secured at the left hand corner by a loop of red tape. He saw at a glance that the document took the form of a letter to him. It began, "My dear and only son, John," and finished with "Your most affectionate and anxious father, William Hanbury." The young man turned over the sheets slowly, glancing at each in turn. This long letter was not, from first to finish, broken in any way. There was no general heading, or divisions into sections, or even paragraphs. From beginning to end no break appeared. The wide margin bore not a single scratch. There was no mark from the address to the signature to attract attention.

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He glanced at the opening words of this long letter. From them it was plain his father meant him to read them quietly and deliberately in the sequence in which they ran. The first sentence was this :

"It is of the greatest importance to the object I have in view that the facts I am about to disclose to you should reach your mind in the order I have here put them ; otherwise the main fact in the revelation might have a pernicious effect upon you, my son."

The young man lowered the manuscript and mused a moment. It was obvious to him that no matter what he should think of the contents of this document his father had considered them of first-rate importance, and likely to influence his own mind and actions in no ordinary way. His father's sense and judgment had never been called in question by any of his father's oldest and closest friends, and those who knew him most intimately never saw reason to account him liable to exaggerated estimates of the influence of ideas, except in this morbid sensitiveness to anything like popular revolutions or dynastic intrigues.

John Hanbury raised the document and recommenced where he had left off. That first sentence was cautionary : the second sentence took away the breath of the young man, by reason of the large field it opened to view, and the strange and intense personal interest it at once aroused. It ran thus :

"About the middle of the last century, when George the Second sat on the throne of England, and the usurper, Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, on the throne of Russia, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was appointed our ambassador to Russia. To Sir Charles Hanbury Williams you and I owe our name although a drop of his blood does not flow in our veins, nor are we in any way that I know of related to him or his."

Again the young man lowered the manuscript from before his eyes. His face suddenly flushed, his eyes contracted, he thrust his head forward as though listening intently. What could be coming ? He strained his hearing to catch sounds and voices muttering and mumbling on the limits of

his thoughts. He was at sea, gazing with wild eagerness into the haze ahead, trying to determine whether what he saw was sea-smoke or cloud or land. Why these great chords in the prelude? What meant these muffled trumpets, telling of ambassadors and courts and kingdoms and empires? What concords were these preluding? What stately themes and regal confluences of harmony? Were these words the first taps of the kettle-drums in his march upon some soul-expanding knowledge? What should he now see with his eyes and hear with his ears and touch with his hands? Upon what marvellous scenes of the undisclosed past was the curtain about to rise? Were some mighty engines that had wrought in the world's history about to be exhibited to his eyes? What mysteries of councils and of courts was he destined to witness and understand? Who was he? Of whom was he? Whence was he? Hanbury and yet no Hanbury. How came it he owned the middle and not the final name of the diplomatist and poet of the days of George the Second?

God of Heaven, could it be there was the blood of a shameful woman in his veins?

His face suddenly blanched. The thick dark veins of his temples and forehead lay down flat and then sank hollow. His swarthy rough skin shrank and puckered. His lips drew backward thinned and livid. His clenched white teeth shone out, and his breath came through them with a hissing noise. He drew himself up to his full height, and for a moment looked round defiantly.

All at once the blood flew back to his cheeks, his forehead, his neck. He covered his face with his bent arm and sank into a chair, crying: "Not that! Oh God, not that! Anything but that!"

He remained for a long time motionless, with his face covered by his arm, and the hand of that arm holding the paper against his shoulder. At first no thoughts passed through his mind. He was no longer trying to see or hear or divine. He felt overwhelmed, and if he had the power to do it he would there and then have ceased to think, have annihilated the power of thought for ever. To his sensitive and highly-wrought mind, base blood of even four or five generations back would have forbidden him any part

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in public life, and, worse than that a thousand times, have destroyed his personal interest and pride in himself for ever.

"I would rather," he moaned, when his mind became more orderly, "carry the hump upon the withered, distorted legs of that man, Oscar Leigh, then a bend sinister. A noble woman may fall, but no noble woman who has fallen would take money for her sin. It is not the sin that would hurt me, but the hire of the sin, the notion that I had the blood of shame in my veins, and the price of shame in my pocket. Bah! I would die of fever if it were so. My blood, the blood in my veins would ferment and stew my flesh. I should rot from within."

He dropped his arm and looked around him. The sight of the familiar room and well-known objects allayed the agony of despair. He drew a deep breath and sat up.

"I have been terrifying myself with shadows, with less than shadows, with absolute blanks; nay, I have been terrifying myself with less than nothing! I have been trying to change the absolute and manifest, and vouched sunlight into gloom and the people of gloom, phantoms. The only evidence before me is evidence against my fears. Instead of an intangible horror, there is an affirmed and ponderable assurance that although my name is Hanbury, and I got that name from Sir Hanbury Williams, not a drop of his blood is in my veins! Why, I am more like a girl with her first love-letter, trying to guess its contents from the outside, than a man with a business document in his hand! Let me read this thing through now as I discussed another matter awhile ago, as if it were a brief put into my hands as a counsel. It is exactly, or almost exactly like a brief." He tossed the sheets carelessly in his hand. "Let us see what the case is."

He sat himself back deliberately in his chair, thrust out his legs before him, and holding the manuscript in both hands began it again.

With contracted brows and face of stern attention he read on. He betrayed no more excitement than if he held in his hand a blue-book which he desired to master for some routine speech. Now and then he cleared his throat softly, imperfectly, indifferent to the result; for all other sound he made he might have been fashioned of marble. Now and

then he turned the leaves and moved slightly from side to side; for all other motion he made he might have been dead.

At last he came to the final line, to his father's signature. He read all and then allowing the manuscript to fall from his hands and his arms to drop to his side, sat in the chair motionless, staring into vacancy.

For an hour he remained thus. Beyond the heaving of his chest and his calm regular respiration, he was perfectly still. At length he sighed profoundly, not from sadness, but deep musing, shook himself, shuddered, looked round him as though he had just waked from sleeping in a strange place.

He rose slowly and going to the window drew up the blind.

No lights were now to be seen in the rear of any of the houses, and complete silence filled the windless air.

"How peaceful," he whispered, "how calm. All the loyal subjects of Her Majesty Queen Victoria are now sleeping in calm security. What a contrast! Here the person of the subject is as sacred as the person of the sovereign. Good heavens, what a contrast! Gracedieu in Derbyshire. I seem to have heard of that place before, but I cannot recollect when or where. Gracedieu must be a very small place, for my father says it is near the village of Castleton. I don't know where Castleton is, beyond the fact that it is in Derbyshire. Gracedieu—Gracedieu—Gracedieu. The name seems familiar enough, but joined with what or whom I cannot think. It is a common name. There must be many places of the name in England. My memory of it must be connected with some circumstance or people, for I am sure I have never been in the place myself or in Castleton either; or in Derbyshire at all, for the matter of that, except passing through. I don't think I can be familiar with the name in connection with the Peak. My only knowledge of the Peak and its neighbourhood is from some written description, and my only memory of the name Gracedieu is one of the ear, not of the eye.

"I am sure my memory of it is of the ear, and that it is a pleasant memory too! but I can get no further now. To-morrow I shall go and see the place for myself. This

whole history is astounding. I am too much stunned by it to think about it yet.

"There's two o'clock striking. I must not wake my mother to tell her. I feel as if my reason were a little disturbed. I feel choked and smothered up—as if I could not breathe. I am worn out and weak. The day has been too much for me. I will go to bed. I am sure I shall sleep. I am half asleep as it is."

He drew back from the window and stretched up his hand for the cord.

"The Queen of England sleeps secure, with all her subjects secure around her—and I——" He did not finish the sentence. He shook his head and pulled down the blind.

Suddenly he struck his thigh with his clenched fist, calling out in a whisper: "Of course, I now remember where I heard of Gracedieu. What a stupid fool I have been not to recall it at once! It's the place that beautiful girl the dwarf introduced me to comes from! My head must be dull not to remember that! His Pallas-Athena, and I——"

He turned out the lights, and began undressing in the dim twilight; there were already faint blue premonitions of dawn upon the blind.

"I wonder," he muttered in the twilight, "will his figures of time include Cophetua and the Beggar Maid! Ha—ha—ha. I am half asleep."

"That old story I read this night was not unlike Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, only—I must not think of it now, I am too dazed and stunned and stupid."

He was in bed, and in a few minutes was asleep. On a sudden he woke up at the sound of his own voice, crying out loud in the profound peace of the early dawn:—

"Thieves! Thieves! Kosciusko to the rescue. The king is on your side!"

He found himself standing up in the bed gesticulating wildly. The sweat was pouring down from his forehead and he was trembling violently in all his limbs.

He stood listening awhile to ascertain if his shout had awakened the household, but unbroken silence followed his cry. Then he lay down and soon fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

TIMMONS'S TEA AND LEIGH'S DINNER.

MR. JOHN TIMMONS'S tea was a very long and unsociable meal. It took hours, and not even the half-dozen red-herrings brought to him by Mrs. Stamer in the fish-basket were allowed to assist at it. They lay in dense obscurity on the floor of the marine-store. Tunbridge Street was now as silent as the grave.

It was after eleven o'clock and John Timmons had not yet emerged from his cellar. All the while he had been below a strong pungent smell of burning, the dry sulphurous smell of burning coke, had ascended from below, with now and then noise of a hand-bellows blowing a fire, but no steam or sound or savour of cooking. Now and again there was the noise of stirring a fire, and now and again the noise of a tongs gripping and loosing and slipping on what a listener might, in conjunction with other evidence, take to be pieces of coke. From time to time the man below might be heard to breathe heavily and sigh. Otherwise he uttered no sound. If the subterranean stoker desired secrecy he had his wish, for there was no one in or near the place listening.

But if no one was listening to the stoker some one was watching the exterior of the marine store in Tunbridge Street. A short time before eleven o'clock a man dressed in seedy black cloth, with short iron-grey whiskers and beard, and long iron-grey hair and wearing blue spectacles, turned into the street, and sat down in a crouching position on the axle-tree of a cart, whose shafts, like a pair of slender telescopes, pointed to the dim summer stars, or taken together the cart and man looked like a huge flying beetle, the body of the cart being the wings, the wheels the high elbowed legs, the man the body of the insect and the two long shafts the antennæ thrust upwards in alarm.

When it was about a quarter past eleven John Timmons emerged from the cellar, carrying in one hand a dark

lantern, with the slide closed. When he found himself in his upper, or ground-floor chamber, or shop, or store, he drew himself to his full height, and, with head advanced sideways, listened awhile.

There was no sound. He nodded his head with satisfaction. Then he went cautiously to the wicket, and with a trowel began digging up the earth of the floor, which was here dark and friable and dry. It was old sand from a foundry, and could be moved and replaced without showing the least trace of disturbance. Timmons did not use the lamp. He had placed it beside him on the ground with the slide closed.

After digging down about a foot he came upon a small, old, courier-bag, which he lifted out, and which contained something heavy. The bag had been all rubbed over with grease and to the grease the dark sand stuck thickly. Out of this bag he took a small, heavy, cylindrical bundle of chamois leather. Then he restored the bag to the hole, shovelled back the sand and smoothed the floor, rose, and stood a minute hearkening, with the cylinder of chamois rolled-up leather in his hand.

This hiding-place had been selected and contrived with great acuteness. It was so close to the foot of the shutters that no one looking in through the ventilators at any angle could catch sight of it. The presence of the moulder's sand at the threshold was explained by the fact that no other substance was so good for canting heavy metal objects upon. Superficial disturbances were to be expected in such a floor, and it was impossible to tell superficial disturbances from deep ones. Once the sand was re-levelled with a broom-handle, used as a striker is used in measuring corn, it was impossible to guess whether any disturbance had recently taken place. In concealing and recovering anything here the operator's ear was within two inches of the street, and he could hear the faintest sound outside. The threshold was not a likely place to challenge examination in case of search.

Timmons now walked softly over his noiseless floor, carrying his lantern in one hand and the roll of leather in the other, until he got behind the old boiler of the donkey engine. Here he slid back the slide of the lantern



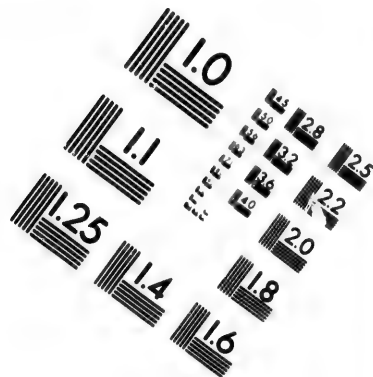
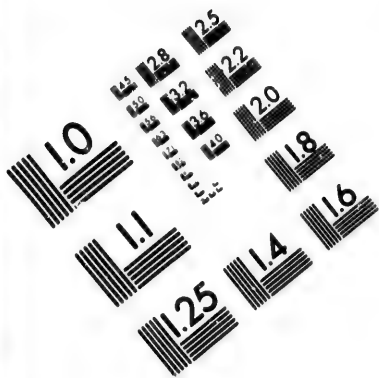
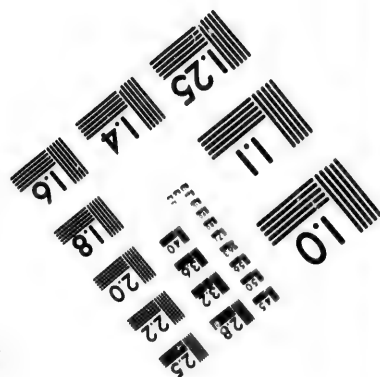
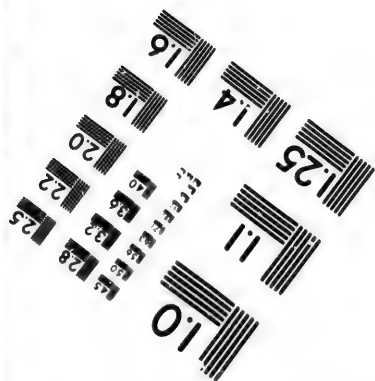
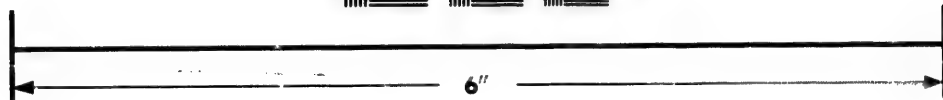
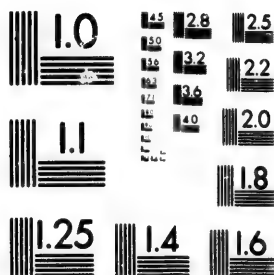


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and unrolled the leather. The latter proved to be a belt about a palm deep, and consisting of little bags or pockets of chamois leather, clumsily but securely sewn to a band of double chamois.

There were a dozen of those little pockets in all ; six of them contained some heavy substance. Each one closed with a piece of string tied at the mouth. Timmons undid one and rolled out on his hand a thick lump of yellow metal about the size of the large buttons worn as ornaments on the coats of coachmen. It was not, however, flat, but slightly convex at one side and almost semi-spherical on the other.

He smiled a well-satisfied smile at the gold ingot, and weighed it affectionately in his black, grimy palm, where the gold shone like a yellow unchanging flame. Timmons gave the ingot a loving polish with his sleeve, dropped it back into its bag, and re-tied the string. Then out of each of his trousers' pockets he took a similar ingot or button, weighed each, and looked at each with affectionate approval, and secured each in one of the half-dozen vacant leather bags.

"Two pounds two ounces all together," he whispered. "I have never been able to get more than fifteen shillings an ounce for it, taking it all round at fifteen carats. His offer is as good as thirty shillings an ounce, which leaves a margin for a man to get a living out of it, if the dwarf is safe. If I had had only one deal with him, I'd feel he's safe, but he has done nothing but talk grand and nonsense up to this, and——" Timmons paused and shook his head ominously. He did not finish the sentence, but as he stood weighing the belt up and down in his hand, assumed suddenly a more pleasant look, and whispered with a smile exhibiting his long yellow teeth : "But after this deal to-night he can't draw back or betray me. That's certain, anyhow."

He unbuttoned his waistcoat, strapped the belt round his lank, hollow waist, blew out the lantern, and walking briskly, crossed the store, opened the wicket and stepped into the deserted street. He closed and locked the door behind him, and turning to his left walked rapidly among the carts and vans to London Road.

Before he disappeared, the elderly man with grizzled hair and whiskers, dressed in seedy black cloth, emerged from the shadow of the cart and kept stealthily and noiselessly in the rear of the marine store dealer. John Timmons was on his way to keep his important business appointment with Leigh in Chetwynd Street, Chelsea, and the low-sized man with blue spectacles was following, shadowing Timmons.

When Leigh left Curzon Street that evening, he made his way into Piccadilly first, and thence westward in a leisurely way, with his head held high and a look of arrogant impudence and exultation on his face. He turned to the left down Grosvenor Place. He was bound to Chetwynd Street, but he was in no humour for short cuts or dingy streets.

He was elated. He walked with his head among the stars. All the men he met were mud and dross compared with him. Whatever difficulty he set himself before melted into nothingness at his glance. If it had suited him to set his purpose to do what other men counted impossible, that thing should be done by him. No political party he led should ever be out-voted, no army he commanded defeated, no cause he advocated extinguished. These creatures around him were made of clay, he of pure spirit, that saw clearly where the eyes of mere men were filled with dust and rheum.

This clock upon which he was engaged would be the eighth wonder of the world when completed. He had not yet done all the things he spoke of, had not yet introduced all the movements and marvels he had described to the groundlings. But the clock was not finished. Why it was not well begun. By and by he would set about those figures of time. They would require a new and vastly complicated movement and great additional power, but to a man of genius what was all this but a bagatelle, a paltry thing he could devise in an hour and execute by-and-by?

Already the clock was enormously complicated, and although it seemed simple enough, as simple as playing cats-cradle when he was near it, when he could see the cause and application of all its parts and instantly put any defect to rights, still when he was away from it for a long time,

part of it seemed to stop and sometimes the whole of it, and—this was distracting, maddening—the power seemed to originate at the escapements, and the whole machine would work backward against his will until the enormous weights in the chimney, out of which he got his power, were wound up tight against the beams, until the chains seemed bursting and the beams tearing and the wheels splitting and dashing asunder. And all the while the escapements went flying in reverse so fast as to dazzle him and make him giddy, and then, when all seemed lost and the end at hand, some merciful change would occur and the accursed reversed movement would die away and cease, and after a pause of unspeakable joy the machine would start in its natural and blessed way again and he would cry out and weep for happiness at the merciful deliverance.

Hah! He felt in thinking of these sufferings about the clock as though the movement were going to be reversed now.

Leigh paused for a moment, and looked around him to bring himself back to the actual world.

"Hah!" he whispered. "I know why I feel so queer. It's the want of food. I have had no food to-day—for the body any way—except what she gave me. What food she gave me for the soul! My soul was never full fed until to-day."

He resumed his course, and, without formulating his destination, directed his steps instinctively towards the restaurant where he usually dined.

"But this alchemy?" his thoughts went on, "this miracle gold? What of it?" He dropped his chin upon his chest and lapsed into deep thought. The boastful and confident air vanished from his eyes and manner. He was deep sunk in careful and elaborate thought.

The position looks simple if regarded in one way. Here this man Timmons calls on him and says:—

I am a marine store dealer, and all kinds of old metal come into my hands. I buy articles of iron and copper and lead and brass and tin and zinc. I buy old battered silver electro-plate and melt it down for the silver. Silver is not worth the attention of a great chemist like you. But sometimes I come across gold. It may reach my hands in

one way or several ways. It may turn up in something I am melting. It may be gilding on old iron I buy. You are not to know all the secrets of my trade as a marine store dealer, which is a highly respectable if not an exalted trade. Now gold, no matter how or where it may be, is worth any man's consideration. The gold that comes my way is never pure. It averages half or little more than half alloy. You are a great chemist. I cannot afford time to separate the gold from the alloy. I cannot spare time to go about and sell it. Every man to his trade; I am a marine-store dealer, you are a great chemist. What will you give me for ingots fifteen carats fine?

The value of gold of fifteen carats to sell is two pounds thirteen shillings and a penny. Gold is the only thing that never changes its price. Any one who wants pure gold must give four pounds four shillings and eleven pence half-penny for it. Fifteen twenty-fourths! The value of fifteen twenty-fourths of that sum is two pounds thirteen and a penny. The alloy counts as dross and fetches nothing—

"Hah! Yes," thought Leigh interrupting his retrospect with a start as he found himself at the door of the restaurant where he proposed dining, "I must have food for the body. Food for the soul, if taken too largely or alone, kills the body, no matter how strong and shapely and lithe it may be. I shall think this matter out when I have eaten. I shall think it out over a cigar and coffee."

He ordered a simple meal and ate it slowly, taking great comfort and refreshment out of the rest and meat. He had a little box all to himself. He was in no humour for company, and it was long past the dinner time in this place, so that the room was comparatively deserted.

When he had finished eating he ordered coffee and a cigar, and putting his legs up on the seat, rested his elbow on the table, lit his cigar and resumed his cogitations in a more vigorous and vocal manner, using words in his mind now instead of pictures.

"Let me see. Where was I? Oh, I recollect. Timmons can't spare time for chemistry or metallurgy and doesn't care to deal with so valuable a metal as gold, even if he had the time. I understand all about metals and chemistry and so on. I entertain the suggestion placed before me

and turn it round in my mind to see what I can make of it. I get hold of a superb idea.

"Of course, after extracting the metal from the alloy, when I had the virgin gold in my hand I should have to find a market for it, to sell it. The time has not yet come for absolutely forming my figures of time in metal. Wax will do even after I begin the mere drudgery of the modelling.

"Well, if I were to offer considerable quantities of gold for sale in the ordinary way, I should have to mention all about John Timmons, and that would be troublesome and derogatory to my dignity, for then it would seem as though I were doing no more than performing cupelling work for this man Timmons."

"The whole volume of science is open to me. I am a profound chemist. I am theoretically and practically acquainted with the whole science from the earliest records of alchemy down to to-day. I agree with Lockyer, that according to the solar spectrum some of the substances we call elements have been decomposed in the enormous furnaces of the sun. I hold instead of there being seventy elements there is but one, in countless modifications, owing to countless contingencies. What we call different elements are only different arrangements of one individual element, the one element of nature, the irreducible unit of the creation, the primal atom. This is a well-known theory, but no one has proved it yet.

"I stand forth to prove it, and how better can I prove it than by realizing the dream of the old transmuters of metals. Alikser is not a substance. The philosopher's stone is not a thing you can carry in your pocket. It is no more than a re-arrangement of primal atoms. What we call gold is, let us say, nothing more than crystallized electricity, and I have found the secret of so bringing the atoms of electricity together that they fall into crystals of pure gold. Up to this the heat of the strongest furnaces have not been able to volatilize one grain of metallic gold: all you have to do to make metallic gold is to solidify it out of its vaporous condition, say electricity or hydrogen, what you please.

"How this is done is my great discovery, my inviolate secret. The process of manufacture is extremely expensive,

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I cannot share the secret with anyone, lest I should lose all the advantage and profit of my discovery, for no patent that all the government of earth could make with brass and steel would keep people from making gold if they could read how it may be done.

"Pure gold is value for a halfpenny less than four pounds five shillings an ounce Troy: I will sell you pure gold, none of your childish mystery gold with its copper, and silver, and platinum clumsiness that will not stand the fire, but pure gold that will defy any test wet or dry, or cupel, for four pounds the ounce. Come, will you buy my Miracle Gold at four pounds the ounce Troy?"

Leigh struck the table triumphantly with his hand, and uttered the question aloud. His excitement had carried him away from the table, and the restaurant. He was now where he could name. He was in the clouds challenging no one he could name to refuse so good an offer. He was simply in the lists of immortality, throwing down the gage to universal man.

No one was present to accept or decline his offer. No one caught the words he uttered. But the sound of the blow of his fist upon the table brought a waiter to the end of the box. Leigh ordered more coffee and another cigar. When they had been brought and he was once more alone, his mind ran on:—

"That is one view of it, that is the view I should offer to my customers and to the world of my position. But what kept me so from closing with this Timmons was the consideration that everyone who heard my version of the matter might not accept it.

"The clock is out-growing me, and often I feel giddy and in a maze with it. A clock cannot fill all my life and satisfy all a man's heart. At the time I began it, years ago, I fancied it would suffice. I fancied it would keep my heart from preying on itself. But now the mechanism is often too much for me when it is not before my eyes. It wears, and wears, and wears the mind, as it wears, and wears, and wears itself.

"When this man Timmons came to me first, I thought of putting the clock to a use I never contemplated when I started making it. Since I began to think of making the

clock of use in my dealings with this Miracle Gold, I have seen her ; I have seen this Edith Grace, who staggered me in my pursuit of Miracle Gold and filled my veins with fire I never knew before. What fools we men are ! And I who have not the proportions of a man, what a fool ten thousand times multiplied ! She shrank from me as though I were a leper, I who am only a monster ! I would give all the gold that ever blazed before the eye-balls of men to have a man's fair inches and straight back ! I ! I ! I ! What am I that I should have feelings ? Why, I am worse than the vilest lepers that rotted without the city gate. *They*, even *they*, had had their days of wholesomeness and strength before the plague fell upon them. I was predestined from birth to stand in odious and grotesque blackness against the sun, to seem in the eyes of all women a goblin spewed out of the maw of hell ! ”

He paused. The clock struck. He sprang to his feet.

“Ten ! ” he said aloud. He said to himself : “Ten o'clock, and I have a good deal to do before Timmons comes at midnight.”

Suddenly he paused on his way to the door of the restaurant, and stood in deep thought. Then he resumed his way to the door and when he got out into the street, said half aloud :

“Strange that I should have forgotten all about that. Have I much to do before midnight ? I told her—the other, the more wonderful and more beautiful one of the same mould, the one with the heart, the lady of the two—that I should decide about the gold between the time I was speaking to her and the same time next week. She did not shrink from me as if I were a leper, this second one of the two. Stop, I have no time to think this matter out now. I have a week. I will take all steps as though I had not seen her in that room. What a pitiful, mean cad that Hanbury is ! Why, he's lower than a leper ! He's more contemptible than even I ! ”

He cleared his mind of all doubts and concentrated it upon what he had to do before meeting John Timmons. He hurried along and in a few minutes let himself into his house with his latch-key.

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home. As he ascended the stairs he thought: "If tombs were only as roomy as this house I shouldn't mind being done with daylight and the world, and covered up. Now, I'd give all I own in this world to have a comfortable mind like Williams, my friend the publican, over the way. Ha-ha-ha!" His hideous laugh, now shrill like the squeal of grating metal, now soft and flabby and gelatinous like the flapping of a wet cloth, echoed in the impenetrable darkness around him.

"If Hanbury were only here now and had a knife—in ten minutes, I'd know more than any living man. Ha-ha-ha!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUARTER PAST TWELVE.

OSCAR LEIGH sat in the dark on the last step but one of the stairs of his house, awaiting the arrival of John Timmons. It was close to the appointed hour. He had spent the interval in his workshop with the clock. He had one of his knees drawn up close to his body, his elbow rested on his knee, his long bearded chin in the palm of that hand. It was pitch dark. Nothing could be seen, absolutely nothing. For all the human eye could learn an inch from it might be a plate of iron or blind space.

"My mother cannot live for ever," whispered the dwarf—like many people who live much in the solitude of cities he had the habit of communing with himself aloud—"and then all will be blank, all will be dark as this place round me. Where shall I turn then? Whom shall I speak my heart to? I designed my clock to be a companion, a friend, a confidant, a solace, a triumph; it is becoming a tyrant and a scourge. It is cruel that my mother should grow old. Why should not things stop as they are now? But we are all on our way to death. We are all on our way out of the world to make room for those who are coming in. No sooner do we grow to full years and strive to form our hearts than we discover we are only lodgers in this world and that those we like are leaving our neighbourhood very

soon, and that while we cannot go with them we cannot remain either.

"A man must have something to think of besides himself; a deformed dwarf must never think of himself at all, unless he thinks great things of himself. I am depressed to-night. I have been living too fast all day. What a long day it has been. I told that young whelp, Hanbury, I should show him something more wonderful than Miracle Gold. I took him with me to Grimsby Street, and the marvellous likeness between those two girls took the sight out of his eyes and the speech out of his mouth, and the little brains he has out of his head. Then I go with him to see *her* who is the other, only with glory added to beauty. She is better and more wonderful than Miracle Gold, better and more wonderful than the substance of the ruby flash in the flame of the diamond. If the devil had but let me grow up as other men, she might have made me try to carry myself and act like a god. I am of Satan's crew now—it would hardly pay to apostatize. Here's Timmons."

The knock agreed upon sounded on the door and reverberated through the hollow darkness. Leigh rose, and sliding his left foot and supporting his body on the stick, held close in under his ribs, went to the door and opened it.

"Twelve to the minute," said Timmons, holding up his hand and waving it in the direction whence came the sound of a church clock striking midnight.

"Let us go for a walk," said Leigh, turning west, away from Welbeck Place and the Hanover, and shutting the door behind him.

"But I have the stuff with me," said Timmons in a tone of annoyance and protest.

"Let us go for a walk, I say," cried Leigh imperiously, striking his thick twisted stick fiercely on the flags as he spoke.

The two men turned to the left, and went on a few paces in silence. Timmons was sulky. A nice thing surely for a creature to ask a man to call on business at his private residence with valuable property at midnight and then slam the door in his face and coolly ask him to go out for a walk! It was a downright insult, but a man couldn't resent an insult from such a creature. That was the worst of it.

"I have been in telegraphic communication with Birmingham since I saw you," said Leigh, stopping under a lamp-post, pouring out a few drops of eau-de-cologne into his palm and inhaling the spirit noisily.

"Oh?" said Timmons interrogatively, as he looked contemptuously at the dwarf.

"Hah! That's very refreshing. Most refreshing. May I offer you a little eau-de-cologne, Mr. Timmons?" said the little man with elaborate suavity.

"No thanks," said Timmons gruffly. "I don't like it." Timmons's private opinion was that a man who used perfume of any kind must be an effeminate fool. It was not pleasant to think this man, with whom he was about to have very important business transactions, should be an effeminate fool. Perhaps it indicated that he was only a new kind of villain; that would be much better.

"Hah!" said Leigh, as they recommenced their walk, "I am sorry for that, for it is refreshing, most refreshing. I was saying that since I had the pleasure of visiting your emporium—I suppose it *is* an emporium, Mr. Timmons?" he asked, with a pleasant smile.

"It may be, or it may be an alligator, or a bird-show, or anything else you like to call it," said Timmons in exasperation. "But you were saying you had a message from Birmingham since I saw you."

"I had not only a message, but several messages. I went straight from your emporium to King's Cross, so as to be near Birmingham and save delay in wiring. I know where I can usually get a clear wire there—a great thing when one is in a hurry—the mere signalling of the message is, as you know, instantaneous."

"Ay," said Timmons scornfully, with an impatient serpentine movement running up his body and almost shaking his head off its long, stork-like neck. "Well, is the fool off the job?" asked he coarsely, savagely, in slang, with a view to showing how cheap he held such unprincipled circumlocution.

The dwarf stopped and looked up with blank amazement on his face and an ugly flash in his eyes. "Is what fool off the job, Mr. Timmons? Am I to understand that you are tired of these delays?"

Timmons snorted in disdainful rage. The implication that he was the only fool connected with the matter lay in the tone rather than the words, but it was unmistakable. The dwarf meant to insult him grossly, and he could not strike him, for it would be unmanly to hit such a creature, and he could not strangle him, for there were people about the street. By a prodigious effort he swallowed down his rage, spread his long thin legs out wide, as if to prevent the flight of Leigh, and said in a hoarse, threatening, sepulchral voice: "Look here, Mr. Leigh. I've come on business. What have you to say to me? I have twenty-six ounces that will average fifteen carats. Are you going to act square and stump up?"

"Hah! I see," said Leigh, smiling blandly, as though rejoicing on dismissing the injurious suspicion that Timmons wanted to back out of the bargain. "I own I am relieved. The fact, my dear sir, is, that on leaving you I telegraphed to my correspondent in Birmingham for——"

"No more gammon," said the other menacingly. They were in front of a church, of the church whose clock they had heard strike midnight before they left Leigh's doorstep. Here there was a quiet space suited to their talk. The church and churchyard interrupted the line of houses, and fewer people passed on that side of the way than on the other. There were no shops in this street. Still it was lightsome, and never quite free from the sound of footsteps or the presence of someone at a distance. Stamer had hinted that Leigh might try to murder Timmons for plunder, and now Timmons was almost in the humour to murder Leigh for rage.

Leigh made a gesture of gracious deprecation with his left hand and bowed. "This, Mr. Timmons, is a matter of business, and I *never* allow anything so odious as fiction to touch even the robe of sacred business." He lifted his hat, raised his eyes to the top of the spire of the church and then bowed low his uncovered head. "For, Mr. Timmons, business is the deity every one of our fellow countrymen worship."

"What are you going to do; that's what I want to know?" said the other fiercely.

"Precisely. Well, sir, I shall tell you my position in two

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words. I suspect my Birmingham correspondent." Leigh threw back his head and smiled engagingly, as though he had ended an amusing anecdote.

"By —, you don't say that?" cried Timmons, fairly startled and drawing back a pace.

"I do."

"What does he know?"

"About what, my dear sir? What does he know about what? Are you curious to learn his educational equipments? Surely you cannot be curious on such a point?" He looked troubled because of Timmons's idle curiosity.

"Don't let us have any more rot. You say you suspect this man?"

"I do?"

"What does he know of the stuff?"

"Of the stuff, as you call it, he knows from me absolutely nothing."

"How can you suspect him if he doesn't know? How can he peach if you haven't let him into the secret?"

"I didn't say I suspected him of betraying the secret of my manufacture."

"Then what *do* you suspect him of—speak plain?" Timmons's voice and manner were heavy with threat.

"Of something much worse than treachery."

"There is nothing worse than treachery in our business."

"I suspect this man of something that is worse than treachery in any business."

"It has no name?"

"It has a name. I suspect this man of not having much money."

"Ah!"

"Is not that bad? Is not that worse than treachery?"

Timmons did not heed these questions. They were too abstract for his mind.

"And you think this villain might cheat, might swindle us after all our trouble?"

"I think this villain capable of trying to get the best of us, in the way of not paying promptly or the full price agreed upon, or perhaps not being able to pay at all."

"And, Mr. Leigh, when did you begin to suspect this unprincipled scoundrel?" Timmons's language was losing

the horrible element of slang as the virtuous side of his nature began to assert itself.

"Only to-day; only since I saw you in Tunbridge Street."

"Mr. Leigh, I hope, sir, you'll forgive my hot words of a while ago. I know I have a bad temper. I humbly ask your pardon, Mr. Leigh." Timmons was quite humble now.

"Certainly, freely. We are to work, as you suggested, on the co-operative principle. If through my haste or inefficiency the money had been lost, we should all be the poorer."

"I have advanced about twenty pounds of my own money on the bit I have on me. My own money, without allowing anything for work and labour done in the way of melting down, or for anxiety of mind, or for profit. If that little bit of yellow stuff could keep me awake of nights, I often wonder how the people that own the Bank of England can sleep at all."

"They hire a guard of soldiers to sleep for them in the Bank every night."

"Eh, sir?"

"Hah! Nothing. Now you understand why I did not ask you into my place and take the alloy. We must wait a little yet. We must wait until I can light upon an honest man to work up the result of our great chemical discovery. I hope by this day week to be able to give you good and final news. In the meantime the ore is safe with you."

"I'm sure I'm truly grateful to you, sir."

"What greater delight can a person have than helping an honest man to protect himself against business wretches who are little better than thieves?"

"Eh?"

"Hah! Nothing. Give me a week. This day week at the same hour and at the same place."

"Very good. I shall be there."

An empty hansom was passing. Leigh whistled and held up his hand to the driver.

Suddenly both he and Timmons started, a long clang came from the other side of the railings.

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holdings," said Leigh, pointing his long, skinny, yellow, hairy hand at the graves. "It's the clock striking the quarter-past twelve. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Timmons, in a tone of reserve and suspicion. He was far from clear as to what he thought of the little man now bowling along down the road in the hansom.

Yes, this man was quite beyond him. Whether the whole thing was a solemn farce or not he could not determine. This man talked fifty to the dozen, at least fifty to the dozen.

Timmons touched his belt. Ay, the gold was there sure enough. That was a consolation anyway, but——

He shook his head, and set out to walk the whole way back to the dim, dingy street off the Borough Road, where he had a bed-room in which he spent no part of his time but the hours of sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EARLY VISITOR TO TIMMONS.

MEN in Mr. Timmons's business never look fresher at one period of the day than another. They seem no brighter for sleep, and, to judge by their appearance, either soap and water has no effect on them, or they seek no effect of soap and water. Lawyers put aside their wigs and gowns, and professors their gowns and mortar-boards, and butchers their aprons, and cooks their caps, before they leave the scene of their labours, but dealers in marine-stores never lay aside their grime. They cannot. The signs and tokens of their calling are ground into their flesh, and would resist any attempt at removal. Mr. Timmons was no exception to his class. On Thursday morning he was in every outward seeming the same as on Wednesday night. He was the same as on all other mornings, except that he came a little earlier than usual to his place in Tunbridge Street. He had private business to transact before throwing open the front of his store to the eyes of

the few stragglers who passed through that gloomy haunt of discarded and disabled vehicles of the humbler kind.

He went in through the wicket, locked the wicket after him, and without loss of time dug up the old canvas-bag from under the sand, rolled up the chamois belt, and, having placed the belt in the bag, re-buried the latter in its old hiding place. Then he rose and stretched himself and yawned, more like a man whose day's work was over than about to begin.

He sat down on the old fire grate where Mrs. Stamer had rested the night before, yawned again, leaned his head against the wail and fell fast asleep. The fact is he had slept little or nothing the night before. Oscar Leigh's strange conduct had set him thinking and fearing, and the knowledge that for the first time his chamois-belt was away from its home made him restless and kept him awake.

John Timmons had no regular time for throwing his bazaar open to the public. The shutters were never taken down before eight o'clock and never remained up after ten. He had come that morning at seven, and sat down to rest and doze before eight. At a little after nine he jumped up with a start and looked round with terror. A knock on the outside of the shutters had aroused him. He had often been at the store as early as seven, but never until now had he heard a demand for admittance at so early an hour. Could it be he had slept long into the day, or were the police after him?

He looked round hastily, wildly, out of his pale blue eyes. He threw up his arms on high, and shook them, indicating that all was lost. Then he composed himself, pulled his hat straight over his forehead, drew down his waistcoat and coat-sleeves, arranged his blue tie, and clearing his throat with a deep loud sound, stepped quickly to the wicket, where for a moment he moved his feet rapidly about to give the newly-levelled sand an appearance of ordinary use.

With great noise and indications of effort he unlocked the door and opened it.

A low-sized man, with grizzled hair and mutton-chop whiskers and blue spectacles, dressed in seedy black, and

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looking like a schoolmaster broken in health and purse, stood in the doorway.

Timmons stared at the man in amazement first, anger next, and lastly rage.

"Well?" he bellowed fiercely; "who are you? What do you want?"

The man did not speak. He coolly stepped over the bar of the wicket and stood close to Timmons in the dimly-lighted store.

The dealer was staggered. Was this a policeman come to arrest him? If he was, and if he had come alone, so much the worse for him!

Timmons put his hand on the man's shoulder, drew the man quickly clear of the wicket, shut the door and locked it. Then turning menacingly on the intruder, who had taken a couple of paces into the store, he said ferociously, "Now, sir! What is it?"

Quick as lightning the man drew a revolver from his waist-band under his coat and presented it at Timmons's head.

The latter fell back against the shutters with an oath and a shout of dismay.

Swift as thought the man dropped the weapon and thrust it back into its place in his waist-band under his coat, saying as he did so:

"You always said you should know me if I was boiled. What do you say now?"

"Stamer!" yelled Timmons, with another oath.

The other laughed. "And not even boiled either."

"By —, I'll have it out of you for this trick yet," said Timmons in a whisper. "What a fright you gave me! and what a shout I made! Someone may have heard me. You should not play such tricks as that, Stamer. It's no joke. I thought you were a copper." And he began walking up and down rapidly to calm himself.

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Timmons," said the man, humbly and with an apologetic cough, "but I think your nerves want looking after."

"You scoundrel!"

"They do indeed, sir; you ought to get your doctor to put them right."

"You cursed blackguard!" hissed Timmons as he strode up and down the dark store, wiping the sweat off his streaked forehead with the ball of his hand.

"In an anxious business like ours, sir, a man can't be too careful. That's my reason again' the drink. Attendin' them temperance meetin's has done me a deal of good. I never get flustered now, Mr. Timmons, since I gave up the drink. I know, sir, you're next door to a teetotaller. It may be too much studyin', sir, with you. I have heard, sir, that too much studyin' on the brain and such like is worse than gin. If you could get away to the sea-side for a bit, sir, I'm certain 'twould do you a deal of good. You know I speak for your good, Mr. Timmons."

"You fool, hold your tongue! First I took you for a policeman——"

"I haven't come to that yet, sir," said the man in a tone of injury, and raising his shoulders to his ears as if to protect them from the pollution of hearing the word.

"And then I took you for a thief."

"Mr. Timmons!" cried the man pathetically. "Couldn't you see who I was? I never came here on business, sir. I came for the pleasure of seeing you, and to try if you would do a favour for me."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Timmons. "Hold your tongue, you fool."

The man said no more, but leaning his back against the wall, looked up blankly at the unceiled rafters and boards of the floor above.

The manner of Mr. John Timmons gradually became less volcanic. He arranged his necktie and thrust his hands deep into his trousers' pockets instead of swinging them round him, or running his fingers through his grizzled hair and whiskers. Suddenly he stopped before his visitor, and said grimly in a low voice, "Stamer, aren't you surprised you are alive?"

Stamer stood up on his feet away from the wall and said in a tone of expostulation, "Now, Mr. Timmons, it isn't so bad as that with me yet. I may have let one or two people see the barrel, you know, just to help business; but I never pulled trigger yet, sir. Indeed I didn't."

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"I mean, you fool, aren't you surprised I didn't kill you?" he asked heavily.

"You kill me, sir! For what?" cried the man in astonishment.

"For coming here at this time of the morning in the disgraceful state you are now in," he said, pointing scornfully at the other.

"Disgraceful state, Mr. Timmons, sir! You don't mean to say you think I'm in liquor?" said Stamer in an injured tone.

"In liquor, no. But worse. You are in masquerade, sir. In masquerade."

"Indeed, I'm not, sir. Why, I couldn't be! I don't even as much as know what it is."

"I mean, sir (and you know very well what I mean), that you are not here in your own clothes. What do you mean in coming here with your tomfoolery?" said Timmons severely. He was now quite recovered from his fright, and wanted to say nothing of his recent abject condition. The best way of taking a man's mind off you is to make an attack on him.

"Not in my own clothes! I hope you don't think I'm such a born looney as to walk about the streets in togs that I came by in the course of business. If you think that of me, sir, you put me down very low. I'm a general hand, as you ought to know, sir, and when there isn't anything to be done in the crib line, I'm not above turning my hand to anything that may be handy, such as tickers in a crowd. I use the duds I have on when I go to hear about the African Blacks. I change about, asking questions for information, and writin' down all the gentlemen tell me in my note-book, and I wind up my questions by asking not what o'clock it is, which would be suspicious, but how long the meeting will last, and no man, sir, that I ever saw can answer that question without hauling out his ticker, and then I can see whether it is all right, or pewter, or a Waterbury. Mr. Timmons, Waterburys is growing that common that men who have to make a living are starving. It's a downright shame and imposition for respectable English gentlemen to give their time to tryin' to improve the condition of the African Black, and do nothing to encourage the English

watch-maker. What's to become of the English watch-maker, Mr. Timmons? I feel for him, sir!"

"You have a great deal too much talk for a man in your position. Why did you come here at this hour and in this outlandish get-up?"

"Well, sir," said Stamer, answering the latter question first, "you see I was here yesterday in fustian, and I didn't like to come here to-day in the same rags. It might look suspicious, for a man in my line can't be too careful. Of course, Mr. Timmons, you and I know, sir, that I come here on the square; but bad-minded people are horrid suspicious, and sometimes their new hands in the coppers make the cruellest and most unjust mistakes, sir. So I hope you'll forgive me coming here as an honest man. It won't occur again, sir. Indeed it won't."

"You have a great deal too much talk for a man in your position," repeated Timmons, who by this time had regained his ordinary composure. "You know I treat you as men in your position are never treated by men in mine. I not only give you a fair price for your goods, but now, when the chance comes, I am going to admit you to the advantages of the co-operative system."

"It's very, very kind of you, sir, and I'm truly thankful, sir; and I need only say that, barring thick and thin uns, I bring you everything, notes included, that come my way. The thick and thin uns, sir, are the only perquisites of the business I look for."

"Stamer, hold your tongue. Tell me in two words, what brought you here?"

"Well, sir, I was anxious to know how you got on last night? You know how anxious I was about you, because of your carrying so much stuff with you down a bad locality like Chelsea. I know you got there safe. I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Timmons, for the liberty I took, but I thought two of us would be safer than one."

"You know I got there! Two of us safer than one! What do you mean? You are full of talk and can't talk straight. Out with it, man; out with it!" cried Timmons, shaking his fist in Stamer's face.

"I took the liberty of followin' you, sir, at a respectful distance and I saw you safe to Mr. Leigh's door——"

"You infernal, prying ruffian——"

"No, sir. I was not curious. I was only uneasy about you, and I only saw you at his door all right ! then I knew I could be of no more use, for, of course, you'd leave the stuff with him, and if any one got wind of it there would be no use in followin' you after, and I could do nothing while you was in the house."

"Ah!" cried Timmons sharply, as though Stamer had convicted himself of lying. "If you came away when you saw me go into the house how did you find out the man's name? I never told you. That's one question I want to ask you ; now here's another. What o'clock was it when you saw me go into the house?"

"Twelve to the minute."

"How do you know? Had you a red herring in your pocket? Eh?" asked Timmons derisively, shaking his forefinger in Stamer's face.

"I heard the clock, a church clock, strike."

Timmons paused and drew back. He recollected his holding up his hand to Leigh, as the latter opened the door, and drawing attention to his own punctuality.

"But then what did you mean by going peeping and prying about there. Did you think I was deceiving you?" The dealer scowled at his visitor as he put the question.

Stamer made a gesture of humility and protest:

"Oh, no, sir! It was this way. When I saw you safe into the house——"

"Oh—ha-ha-ha! So you saw me safe into the house, did you? Ha-ha-ha—ho-ho-ho!" laughed Timmons in an appallingly deep voice.

"Well, no," answered Stamer in mild protest. "I didn't exactly see you go into the house. You know, for the moment I forgot I had these duds on, and I thought you might turn round and look back and see me and be wild with me for followin' you, so the minute you stopped at the door and knocked I slipped into a public that's at the corner, to be out of sight in case you should turn around, as most people do, to have a good look before going into a strange house—anyway I always do——"

"Very likely. Very likely you do have a good look round both before and *after* too. Well, and when you got

into the public-house—although you are not on the drink—you began making your inquiries, I dare say?" said Timmons in withering reproach. "Or, may be you didn't bother to ask questions, but told all you knew right off to the potman or the barmaid. Eh?"

"Mr. Timmons, you're too hard," said Stamer in an injured tone, and with a touch of outraged dignity. "If you don't want to hear what happened, or won't believe what I say, I'll stop."

"Well, go on, but don't take all day."

"There isn't much to tell. I got into the private bar at the end of a passage and, just as I got in, the landlord was sayin' how Mr. Leigh, the little gentleman over the way, with the hump on him, had been in that day, and had told him wonderful things he was going to do with the skeleton of Moses, or somethin' of that kind, which had been found at the bottom of the Nile, or somewhere. This mention of a little man with a hump made me take an interest, for I remembered what you told me last evenin'. And, as the landlord was talking quite free and open for all to hear, I asked for a tuppenny smoke and a small lemon—for I'm off the drink——"

"Go on, or you'll drive me to it," said Timmons impatiently.

"I couldn't understand what the landlord was sayin' about the Prince being as dry as snuff, but anyway, after a minute he said: 'There he is, winding up his wonderful clock,' and all the men in the bar looked up, and I did too, and there was the little man with the hump on his back pulling at something back and forward like the rods in a railway signal-box."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, and all the men in the bar saw him."

"How many men were there in the private bar?"

"Half-a-dozen or eight."

"You were drunk last night, Stamer."

"I was as sober as I am now."

"What o'clock was it then?"

"Well, I cannot say exactly, between twelve and half-past."

"How long did you stay in that public-house?"

"Until closing time."

"And how soon after you went in did you see the little man working the handle, or whatever it was?"

"A minute after I went in. As I went in the landlord was speakin', and before he finished what he had to say he pointed, and I looked up and saw Mr. Leigh."

"The next time you dog me, and tell a lie to get out of blame, tell a good lie."

"Mr. Timmons, what I tell you is as true as that there's daylight at noon."

"Tell a better lie next time, Stamer," said Timmons, shaking his minatory finger at the other.

"Strike me dead if it isn't true."

"Why, the man, Mr. Leigh, did not go back into the house at all last night. He and I went for a walk, and were more than half-a-mile away when a quarter past twelve struck."

"Has your Mr. Leigh a twin brother?"

"Pooh! as though a twin brother would have a hump! Stamer, I don't know what your object is, but you are lying to me."

"Then the man's neighbours does not know him. All the men in the bar, except two or three, knew the hump-backed Leigh, and they saw the man's face plain enough, for at twenty minutes past twelve by the clock in the bar he stopped working at the handle and turned round and nodded to the landlord, who nodded back and waved his hand and said, 'There he his a noddin' at me now.' The publican is a chatty man. And then Mr. Leigh nodded back again, and after that turned round and went on working at the handle again."

"I tell you, at a quarter past twelve last night, I was standing under the church clock you heard, talking to Mr. Leigh, and as they keep all public-house clocks five minutes fast, that's the time you say you saw him. I never found you out in a lie to me, Stamer. I'll tell you what happened. You got beastly drunk and dreamed the whole thing."

"What, got drunk in half an hour? 'Tain't in the power of liquor to do it. Mr. Timmons, I swear to you I had nothing to drink all yesterday but that small lemon. I swear it to you, so help me —, and I swear to you, so

help me, that all I say is true, and that all I say I saw, I saw with my eyes, as I see you now, with my wakin' eyes and in my sober senses. If you won't take my word for it, go down to Chelsea and ask the landlord of the Hanover—that's the name of the house I was in."

The manner of the man was earnest and sincere, and Timmons could not imagine any reason for his inventing such a story. The dealer could make nothing of the thing, except that Stamer was labouring under some extraordinary delusion. Timmons had never been to Leigh's place before and never in the Hanover. If he had not been with Leigh during the very minutes Stamer was so sure he had seen Leigh working at his clock, he would have had no hesitation whatever in believing what the other had told him. But here was Stamer, or rather the hearsay evidence of the landlord of the public-house, that Leigh was visibly working at his clock and in Chetwynd Street at the very moment the dwarf was talking to himself in the open air half-a-mile away. Of course five minutes in this case might make all the difference in the world, and there is often more than five minutes' difference in the time of clocks in public places; but then Stamer said Leigh was together the whole quarter-hour from midnight to a quarter past twelve!

There was something hideous, unearthly, ghastly, about this deformed dwarf. The chemist or clockmaker, in the few interviews which had taken place between them, had talked of mysteries and mysterious power and faculties which placed him above other men. There was something creepy in the look of the man, and something horrible in the touch of his long, lean, sallow, dark-haired, monkey-like fingers. The man or monster was unnatural, no doubt—was he more or less than mortal? Did he really know things hidden from other men? To make up for his deformities and deficiencies had powers and faculties denied to other men been given to him?

John Timmons did not believe in ghosts, but he did believe in devils, and he was not sure that devils might not even now assume human form, or that Oscar Leigh was not one of them, habilitated in flesh for evil purposes among men.

Stamer held no such faith. He did not believe in devils. He believed in man, and man was the only being he felt afraid of. He thought it no more than reasonable that Timmons should lie to him. He had the most implicit faith in the material honesty of Timmons in the dealings between the two of them; but lying was a consideration of spiritual faith, and he had no spiritual faith himself. But he was liberal-minded and generous, and did not resent spiritual faith in others. It was nothing to him. Timmons was the only man he had ever met who was absolutely honest in the matter of money dealings with him, and Stamer had elevated Timmons into the position of an idol to which he paid divine honours. He would not have lied to Timmons, for it would have done no good. He brought the fruits of his precarious and dangerous trade as a thief and burglar to Timmons, and he acted as agent for other men of his trade and class, and Timmons was the first fence he had met who treated him honourably, considerately. He had conceived a profound admiration and dog-like affection for this man. He would have laid down his life for him freely. He would have defended him with the last drop of his blood against his own confederates and associates. He would not have cheated him of a penny; but he would have lied to him freely if there was any good in lying, but as far as he could see there wasn't, and why should he bother to lie?

He was anxious about the fate of the twenty-six ounces of gold. If Timmons got the enhanced price promised by the dwarf, some more money, a good deal more money, was promised to him by Timmons, and he knew as surely as fate that if Timmons succeeded the money would be paid to himself. But he was afraid of the craft of this Oscar Leigh who was not shaped as other men, whom other men suspected of possessing strange powers, and who, according to his own statement, had been fishing up the corpses of prophets, or something of that kind, out of the bottom of the Nile.

A long silence had fallen on the two men. Timmons had resumed his walk up and down the store, but this time his eyes were cast down, his steps slow. He had no reason to distrust Stamer beyond the ordinary distrustful-

ness with which he regarded all sons of Adam. He had many reasons for relying on Stamer more than on nine-tenths of the men he met and had dealings with. He was puzzled, sorely puzzled, and he would much prefer to be alone. He was confounded, but it would not do to admit this, even in manner, to Stamer, and he felt conscious that his manner was betraying him. He stopped suddenly before his visitor and said sharply "Now that you have been here half-an-hour and upwards can't you say what you want. Money?"

"No, sir. Not money to-day. I called partly to know if you was safe, and partly to know if you had arranged. I hope you will excuse my bein' a little interested and glad to see you all right." Stamer never used slang to Timmons. He paid this tribute to the honesty of the dealer.

"Yes. Of course, it would be bad for you if I was knifed or shot. You'd fall into the hands of a rogue again. Well, you may make your mind easy for the present. I am alive, as you see. He did not come to any final arrangement last night. I brought the stuff back again with me safe and sound, and I am to meet him again at the same place in a week. Are you satisfied now?"

"No!" Stamer moved towards the door.

"Why?"

Stamer shook his head. "Have nothing to do with that man."

"What maggot have you got in your head now, Stamer?"

"He'll sell the pass. It is not clear in my mind now that he has not sold the pass already, that he has not rounded on you. If you meet him there again in a week it isn't clear to me that you won't find more company than you care for."

"What do you mean? Shall you be there?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"The police."

Stamer hurried through the wicket and was gone.

Timmons shut the door once more, and leaning his back against it plunged into a sea of troubled thoughts.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

GRACEDIEU, DERBYSHIRE.

WHEN Edith Grace came into the little sitting-room in Grimsby Street, the morning after her flight from Eltham House, she found her grandmother had not yet appeared. She went to Mrs. Grace's door and asked if she might bring the old woman her breakfast. To her question she received a blithe answer that Mrs. Grace would be ready in a minute. The girl came back to the room where the breakfast was laid and sat down to wait. The old woman always presided, and sat with her face to the window. She liked to see as much sunlight and cheerfulness as came into Grimsby Street. On the table were two plates, two cups, eggs, rashers, and a loaf of bread. By the side of Mrs. Grace's plate a letter. It was a frugal-looking breakfast for middle-class people, but much more elegantly appointed than one would expect to find in a Grimsby Street lodging house. The cutlery, linen, silver and china were bright and clean and excellent. There were no delicacies or luxuries on the table, but the adjuncts of the viands were such as no lady need take exception to.

Edith was dressed in a perfectly plain black gown, one she had got for her duties as companion. She had a trace of colour at the best of times. This morning she looked pale and listless. She had slept little during the night. She had lain awake, alternately reviewing the extraordinary events of the day before, and trying to discover some means by which in her future search of employment she might insure herself against repeating her recent experience.

Up to this she knew little or nothing of the world. Her father, a barrister, had died when she was young. Her mother had been dead since her childhood. She had spent seven years at a boarding school, during which time she had come home for the holidays to find her grandmother's position gradually declining, until from a fine house in Bloomsbury the old woman was reduced to poor

lodgings in Grimsby Street, where the two had lived together since Edith left school, three years ago. The money left her by her father had been more than enough to pay the fees of the "select seminary for young ladies" where she had spent those seven years.

While at school she had kept much apart from the other boarders, and had made no friends, for she knew all the girls she met at Miss Graham's had homes much better than she could hope to possess after her grandmother had been compelled to leave Russell Square.

Edith did not care to take any of her school-fellows into the secret of their decaying fortunes. She was too proud to pretend to be their equal in wealth, and too sensitive to allow them to know how poor she was. She was the quietest, most silent, most reserved girl in all the school. The majority of those around her were the daughters of City men. Her father had been a barrister. He had never soiled his fingers with business. He had been a gentleman by the consecration of generations of forefathers who had never chaffered across a counter, never been in trade; and she was a lady. She did not despise those around her for their wealth or unfortunate origin. She simply kept herself to herself, and made no friends. She was kind and considerate to all, and polite almost to painfulness, but she would let no one near her. Her school-fellows said Edith Grace would be perfect, simply perfect, if she only had a heart.

But, alas! the girl had a heart, and what is worse still, a heart very hard to possess in seeming peace in a young breast confronted with a decaying fortune.

Her school-fellows said she ought to be a queen. By this they meant that she was, by her appearance and manners, suited to statelinesses, and splendours, and pageants. They conceived a queen to be above the common nature of our kind. To be free from the aches and pains of feeling. To be superior to the bemeaning littlenesses of life. To be incapable of joy or suffering which does not involve the triumph or the ruin of a state.

From the moment of her father's death she knew she must expect to be poor, poor far below any depth she would have been likely to know, if he had lived a dozen years

longer. Young as she then was, she felt within herself a love of all the beautiful things that money can buy. She loved rich and exquisite flowers, and dainty fabrics, and sparkling stones, and gleaming metals, and fine odours, and stately pictures, and glories of lamps and melody. As she grew older, her love of these things would, she told herself, increase. To what purpose? To the torture of desire denied; for with such splendour she could hold no converse. She was poor, and she should always be poor. What was to be done? Beat down, stamp out these tastes, teach herself to rise above them. Deny herself.

In time she should leave school and be a woman. She should, when she left school, be a young woman, and a young woman of no ordinary personal attractions. She knew this as fully as she knew that the perfume of the tuberoses is sweet, by the evidence of one of her senses. How should it be with her, then? All these other girls around her would marry, she never. For who would come wooing her? Some other lodger in Grimsby Street! A City clerk, or a prosperous hairdresser, or a furniture dealer, or a man who contracted for the supply of suppers, or a man who beat carpets, or a baker in a white cap, or the son and heir of a tailor! She had no moderation of power to discriminate between any of these. They were all preposterously impossible lovers, and there were no others left! No thing was degrading even to fancy. There was only one way of meeting this aspect of her poverty—she should never marry. That was easy enough. Nothing could be easier than to keep all men at as great a distance as she kept the cabman, or the young man who sold her the double elephant paper for drawing, or the telegraph clerk. No man should, to her dying day, ever say anything to her beyond the mere business words necessary to their meeting. Thus she should be as strong in this way as she was now in her indifference to diamonds or the opera. People said girls were weak, but girls could be as strong as men, stronger than men, if they only made up their minds not to long for pretty or fine, or interesting objects.

In the latter class Edith supposed lovers would find their place.

She should be strong because she should be self-contained

She should be content because she should be undesiring. She should be independent because she should form no ties of any kind. Her position should be completely unassailable.

So she did not allow herself to display any particular affection for any one of her school-mates. She was uniformly kind, and gentle, and polite. But she was too poor to love anyone, for it would rend her heart to be separated from one she loved, and she could run no risk of breaking her heart about her poverty when her poverty did not step in to separate her from one on whom she settled her affections.

So for the three years she had lived at home with her grandmother she comported herself with strict exclusiveness. No young man out of the formidable list of possible suitors she had allowed to a young girl with her means had approached her to tell a tale of love, and towards all whom she met she sought to pass for a retiring shadow.

But her first advent into the world had brought an alarming, a horrible awakening.

The discipline of denial to which she had inured herself prepared her for the loss of her modest competency. Up to the time of leaving school, she had regarded her income as sure as the coming of the planets into the constellations. Soon after leaving Miss Graham's doubts began to arise in her mind. When at length the blow came, and she learned she was penniless, no giant despair crushed her. She simply bowed to the inevitable, without going to the trouble of even affecting indifference. The money or income had been hers, and was gone. To lose an income was an unmixed evil, but it ought to affect her less than others, for had she not cultivated self-abnegation? Was she not used to desire little or nothing, and was not the step between asking for little next to that of working for the necessities of life, for the things indispensable? She should now have to go forth and earn her bread, for she could not think of encroaching on the little left to her grandmother. She was young, and healthy, and accomplished, as far as Miss Graham's select seminary for young ladies at Streatham could make a receptive pupil accomplished.

Up to this she had allowed herself only one luxury, a

deep, and quiet, and romantic love, the love for her kind-hearted old grandmother. That need not even now be put away, could not, indeed, be put away, but it might and must be dissimulated. Or, anyway, it might and must remain undemonstrative, for to show much affection to her grandmother would be to enhance the pain of the old woman at the parting.

Hence she steeled herself, and prepared for the separation with seeming indifference, which only made the desolation seem to Mrs. Grace more complete, more like death, and freed it from the torture of struggling with a living and cruel force.

When Edith Grace saw Oscar Leigh, and arranged to go as companion to his mother, although she shrank naturally from his objectionable manner and unhappy appearance, she was better pleased than if he had belonged to the ordinary mould of man. His deformities made him seem a being proper to a new condition of life, a condition of life in which his very unusualness would enable her to preserve and even increase the feeling of reserve, and being apart from the world, cultivated by her with such success at Miss Graham's and at home. He was so much out of the common, he need not be taken into account at all. His unhandsome appearance would be no more to her than the unhandsomeness of this street in which she, who dreamed of parks and palaces, and the Alhambra of Granada, lived. No doubt to look at him was to feel unpleasant, but the endurance of unpleasant sights was not very much harder, if so hard, as doing without pleasing sights, and she had taught herself to abstain from longing after gratifying the eyes. The system of self-denial which she had imposed upon herself with so much success needed only a little extension to cover endurance of the undesirable. She was strong, fortified at every point. This system of hers was the whole secret of getting through life scatheless. It afforded an armour nothing could pierce. It made her superior to fate—absolutely superior to fate.

She had built for herself a tower of strength. She lived in a virgin fortress.

In thinking over at Miss Graham's the possible suitors a young lady who lodged in Grimsby Street might have, she

had allowed as likely a City clerk, or a prosperous hairdresser, or a man who contracted for the supply of suppers, or a man who beat carpets, or a baker in a white cap, or the son and heir of a tailor. With such, she had some kind of acquaintance, either personal or by strong hearsay. Often in amused reverie, she passed these candidates for the hand of an imaginary young lady before her view. The young men were invariably in their Sunday best when they came a-wooing. There was a dandified air, an air of coxcombry, about them which amused her. They were, of course, dandies only after their kind; not like Lord Byron in his Child Harold days, or the dandy officers for whom the great Duke of Wellington prayed so devoutly. They wore gloves of a sort, and flowers in their button-holes. They carried canes in genteel imitation of the beaux of old. Their hair was arranged with much precision and nicety. Their figures were good. They were stalwart and valorous, not indeed, in the grand way, but as of their kind. They made displays, as displays may be made in reasonable conduct, of their physical graces and alertness. They carried themselves with the heroic air, without the inartistic stiffness of soldiers of the rank and file. Their features were well proportioned and agreeable, and they wore smiles of bland confidence and alluring archness. They looked their approbation of this imaginary young lady, but their good manners, their awe, never allowed them to do anything more than strut like harmless peacocks before the object of their admiration.

When the girl was alone and in good spirits, she often laughed aloud at these phantom suitors of this imaginary young lady lodger in Grimsby Street. She did not look on them with the pity of disdain. She regarded them as actors in a play. She summoned them for her amusement and dismissed them without emotion, without even thanks for the entertainment which they had afforded her.

On stepping out of the world of dreams into the world of reality what had happened?

This man, this deformed, odious little man, whose bread she was to eat for hire and whose money she was to take for services under his roof, had paid her attentions! forced his hateful attentions upon her! attempted to kiss her after an acquaintance of a few hours!

Good Heavens ! Had she, Edith Grace, lived to see that day ? Had it come to this with her ? Had she fallen so low ? Had she suffered such degradation and lived ?

It was not the young lady lodger in Grimsby Street of her imagination, who had been compelled to listen to the ridiculous suits of the clerk, and the caterer, and the carpet-beater, and the baker, and the tailor of her fancy, but she herself, Edith Grace, who had had *love* offered to her by this miserable creature who was her master also !

Yet she had lived through it, and the house, Eltham House, had not fallen down on them, nor had the ground opened and swallowed them, and neither her grandmother herself nor Leigh seemed to realise the enormity of the crime !

Even if she had been the young lady of her imagination, and the young men of her fancy had taken flesh and done this thing, it would be unendurable degradation. What had occurred had been endured, although to reason a thing infinitely less seemed unendurable ! In pity's name, had all that had taken place happened to her, Edith Grace ?

Thoughts in part such as these had haunted the dark hours and early morning of the young girl. What wonder she was wakeful. Then she had to consider the future. Turn which way she might, the prospect was not cheerful. The necessity for her seeking her own living was as imperative as ever. She could not live at home in idleness without absolutely depriving her grandmother of the comforts of life. All her own money had vanished into thin air, and so much of Mrs. Grace's that there would be barely enough for her mere comfort. When Edith arranged to go to Eltham House Mrs. Grace had given the landlady notice that she should no longer require the second bed-room. It was doubtful if even the sitting-room could be retained, and if the old woman had to content herself with a bedroom and the "use" of a sitting-room (which no lodger ever used except to eat in) the poor old woman would mope and pine and, in all likelihood, sicken and break down. This consideration, being one not of her own, Edith allowed to trouble her deeply. For herself she had no pity, but she could not forbear weeping in the security of her own room when she thought of her grandmother

suffering absolute poverty in old age. No wonder the girl looked pale and worn.

She was standing at the window absorbed in thought, when Mrs. Grace glided into the room and took the girl in her arms before Edith was aware of her presence.

"Thank God, you are here once more, my darling. To see you makes even this place look like home. Oh, what a miserable time it was to me while my child was away. It seemed an age. Short as it was, it seemed an age, darling. Of one thing, Edy, I am quite certain, that no matter what is to become of us we shall never be separated again, never, darling, never. That is, if you are not too proud or too nice to be satisfied with what will satisfy your old grandmother."

It was only in moments of great emotion that Mrs. Grace called her grand-daughter by the affectionate pet name, Edy. The girl's name was Edith, and she looked all Edith could mean, and deserved the full stateliness of the name. But this morning the old woman's heart was overflowing upon the lost one who had returned. The heart of the blameless prodigal was so disturbed and softened that it became human, and all Edith could say or do was to fall upon the bosom of the old woman, and with her young, soft, moist lips, kiss the dry lips of the other and cry out :

"Oh, mother ! oh, mother !" and burst into tears.

Mrs. Grace calling the young girl Edy was not by any means common, but Edith's weeping in a scene was without any parallel. It frightened the grandmother. What she, the passionless, the collected, the just Edith in tears ! This was very serious, very serious indeed. The affair of Eltham House must have had a much greater effect upon the child than anything which had hitherto occurred, for Mrs. Grace could remember no other manifestation exactly so sudden and so vehement.

"There child, there !" cried the old woman caressing the bent, shapely, smooth head against her breast. She durst not say any more. She was afraid of checking this outburst of feeling, afraid of saying something which would not be in harmony with the feelings of this troubled young heart.

So the girl sobbed her long-pent torrent of chaotic feeling away, the old woman stroking softly the dark glossy hair

with one hand and pressing the head to her bosom with the other.

In a little while Edith recovered her composure, and stealing out of her grandmother's arms, turned towards the window to conceal her red and tear-stained face. The old woman went and busied herself at the table, re-arranging what was quite in order, and making changes that were no improvement. At last she sat down and saw the letter awaiting her close to her plate. She took it up anxiously, hoping it might prove the means of introducing some new subject between them.

Mrs. Grace was no slave to that foolish modern habit of tearing and rending a letter open the minute one sees it, as though it were a long-lost enemy. Most of the few letters she received were pleasant. She liked to savour the good things that came by the post before she bolted them. To one who knows how to enjoy this self-denial of delay, the few moments before a letter addressed in unknown or partly remembered handwriting are more precious than the coarse pleasures of realization. While the seal is unbroken one holds the key of an intensely provoking mystery. Once the envelope is removed the mystery is explained, and no mystery ever yet improved upon explanation. The writing of this letter was unknown to Mrs. Grace. She could make nothing of it. She turned the back, she could make nothing of that either. She was expecting a letter from her solicitor, Mr. James Burrows. This was not from him. He had the bad taste to *print* his name on the back of the envelope, a vandalism which paralyzed all power of speculation at once, and was more coldly and brutally disenchanting than the habit of writing the name of the sender on the left-hand corner of the face, for this external signature had often the merit of being illegible. The writing on the face of this was in a business, clerkly hand. The thing was a circular, no doubt.

"Edy," she said, "here is a letter. I have not my glasses with me. Will you read it to me, dear?"

The girl turned round, took the letter and went back to the window—for a better light.

"From whom is it?" asked Mrs. Grace, when she saw Edith break the envelope.

"It is signed Bernard Coutch," answered the girl in a low voice.

"Bernard Coutch—Bernard Coutch. I do not know any one of that name. Are you quite sure the address is right?"

"Quite sure, mother. 'Mrs. Grace, 28, Grimsby Street.'"

"Well, go on, child. Let us hear what this Mr. Coutch has to say. Breakfast must wait. Nothing grows cold in such lovely weather. I hope this Mr. Coutch has good news."

"DEAR MADAM,

"Mr. James Burrows, solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn, wrote me a few weeks ago, with a view to ascertaining some facts regarding the Graces of Gracedieu——"

"Stop," said Mrs. Grace, "where is the letter dated from?"

"Castleton, Derbyshire," answered the girl with some awakening of interest in her voice and manner.

"Wait a minute, Edith." The old woman rose excitedly and came to the window. "I must tell you, dear, that when first Mr. Burrows wrote me to say the bank had failed, and that your money and mine were gone, I went to him, as you know, and got no hope of ever saving anything out of the bank. But I did not tell you then, for I was ashamed of being so weak as to mention the matter to Mr. Burrows, that I told him all I knew of the history of the Graces of Gracedieu, and of the old story of mysterious money going to the runaway Kate Grace, of a hundred and twenty or thirty years ago. I asked him to make what inquiry he could, and let me know any news he might pick up. I was foolish enough to imagine, dear, that something might come to you out of the property of the rich Graces if we only knew where they are, if there are any. Now go on, dear."

Edith recommenced the letter :—

"DEAR MADAM,

"Mr. James Burrows, solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn, wrote me a few weeks ago, with a view to ascertaining some facts regarding the Graces of Gracedieu, near this place. He requested, with a view to saving time, that I should forward you the result of my inquiries.

"I regret to say that I have not been able to find out much. Gracedieu is a small residence about a couple of miles from this. No property of any extent is or was, as far as I can ascertain, attached to the place. In the middle of the last century the Graces lived in this town, and dealt, I believe, in wool. The family were in comfortable circumstances, and one of the daughters, a lady of great beauty, attracted the attention of all who lived in the town, or saw her in passing through. She disappeared and was, so the story goes, never afterwards heard of here. It was rumoured she married a very handsome and rich young foreign nobleman who had been on a visit in the neighbourhood, but nothing is known for certain of her fate.

"Some years after the disappearance of the young lady, Mr. Grace seemed to come suddenly into a large amount of money; for he gave up the wool business, bought a few acres of land, and built a house for himself a couple of miles out of the town, and called his place Gracedieu. From the name of the house it was assumed the gentleman the young Miss Grace had married was a French nobleman. Why this was supposed from the name is not clear, except that the name is French. It is, however, a common name enough in England. I know two other Gracedieus. About a hundred years ago the Graces left Gracedieu for ever, and went to reside, it is believed, in London. Absolutely nothing else is known of them in this neighbourhood, and even this much would not be remembered only for the romantic disappearance of Miss Kate Grace, the rumour she was married, and the sudden influx of wealth upon the family.

"The land attached to Gracedieu in the time of the builder of the house was about five acres. The family, as far as is known, never held any other property here.

"If you desire it, search, involving considerable expense, can be made in the records of the town and parish and county, but I understand from Mr. Burrows that no expense is to be incurred without hearing further from you or him.

"Yours faithfully,

"BERNARD COUTCH."

The girl turned away from the window, dropped the letter to the floor, and said in a listless voice, looking, with eyes that did not see external things, at the old woman, "Mother you ought to be glad you are not one of the family of Grace."

"Why, child, why?"

"We are an accursed race."

"My child! my child, what folly you talk. There is no disgrace in marriage, no disgrace in this. There was no shame in this, and who knows but the mysterious man who ran away with the beautiful Kate long ago, and married her, may now be a great man in France. He was a nobleman then and honours are things that grow, dear. If we could only find out the title he had. I suppose we could if we tried."

The girl shook her head. "Where there is no disgrace, mother, there is no secrecy about such things. I thought the Graces went further back than that."

"What! Do you want them to go back to Noah or Adam? Why this is four or five generations! How many of the best titled houses in England go back so far? Nonsense, child, I wish we knew what the French title is."

"So there really was no family of Grace of Gracedieu after all. That is, if this account is true. And there was no estate, mother, and there can be no money. I am very, very sorry for you, mother."

"For me, child! Why for me? I don't want anything, pet. I have enough for my darling and myself, more than enough. I did not make these inquiries on my own account, but it was on yours that I asked Mr. Burrows to find out for me. Anyway, dear, no harm has been done. Come pet, breakfast must be getting cold even this warm morning. How delightful it is to be able to breakfast with the window open. Tea is such a luxury this warm weather."

It was the only luxury on that table tasted by either woman that morning. The food went away untouched.

When the landlady saw the unbroken food, she said to her daughter, "I know the poor ladies are sorely troubled by their losses in that shameful bank. There's one thing I can't make out about our corrupt nature. The people who are troubled by something wrong with their bodies eat and

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drink more than is good for them by way of trying to coax themselves to break their fast, and them that are troubled in their minds don't eat anything at all. The matter seems upside down somehow."

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO OF A RACE.

THAT day had not opened pleasantly or auspiciously for Mrs. Grace and her grand-daughter. As soon as the pretence of breakfast was disposed of, Edith went to her room and the old woman took her work and sat in the open window.

Edith was too unnerved to think of doing anything that day towards getting a new place. Disappointment and despair seemed to hedge her in on all sides; but she was resolved to persevere in getting a situation as soon as she recovered from the effects of her late discomfiture and shock. The need for immediate employment was all the greater now, for her outfit and expedition to Eltham House had not only absorbed the money she had by her, but all her grandmother could command as well, and there would be little or nothing coming in now.

For herself she did not care, because she had schooled herself to regard herself and her feelings as of no consequence. Until that morning she had enjoyed the sustaining power of family pride. If what this attorney of Castleton said were true, she no longer could count on that support. What were three or four or five generations to one who had believed her name and race had come with the blood-making William? She had no blood in her veins worth speaking about. She was at most fifth in line from an humble dealer in wool, in an obscure provincial town. She who had regarded half-a-dozen of the great ducal houses as new people! She! who was she or what was she? After all perhaps it might be better that one who had to earn her bread by rendering service should not have too far back reaching a lineage. There was less derogation in earning money by service

when one came of a race of humble dealers in wool than if one had come of an historic house.

But the discovery had a depressing effect nevertheless. Her grandmother didn't feel the matter, of course, so much as she felt it; for the old woman had none of the Grace blood in her veins. Never had she, while at school, committed the vulgar folly of boasting of her family. How fortunate that was, in face of the fact disclosed this morning. Why, her people had started as small shopkeepers, come by money and affected therefrom the airs of their betters, and the consequence of illustrious race. The claims of the Grace family were nothing more than a piece of pretentious bombast, if not, at the outset, deliberate lying. No doubt her father had believed he was well-bred and of gentle birth, but his father before him, or, anyway, his father before him again, must have known better.

No doubt the house of Leeds could show no higher origin, but then she had had nothing but contempt for the house of Leeds. She would rather have come of an undistinguished soldier of William's, one who never in himself, or any descendant of his, challenged fame or bore a title, than owe origin to a City source. She had believed the Graces had the undiluted blood of Hastings, and now she found they could trace back no further than the common puddle of an obscure country town. The romantic past and mysterious background of an old race, no longer modified the banalities of her position. If she were to choose a suitor of her peers she should have to take one of the bourgeois tribe, and one in poor circumstances, too, to suit her own condition!

Why, if ever she thought of marriage, the fit mate for her was to be found in that line of vulgar admirers she had paraded for her amusement, her laughter, her scorn!

After the discovery of that morning, she, Edith Grace, could lift her head no more.

The hours of the weary, empty day went by slowly for the girl. The blaze of sunlight was unbroken by a cloud. The sun stood up so high in heaven it cast scant shadows. Grimsby Street was always quiet, but after the morning efflux of men towards the places of their daily work, the street was almost empty until the home-returning of the men in the late afternoon and early morning. In the

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A sense of oppression and desolation fell upon Edith. In the old days, that were only a few hours of time gone by, she could always wrap herself from the touch of adversity in the rich brocaded cloak of noble, if undistinguished, ancestry. Now she was cold and bare, and full in the vulgar light of day, among the common herd of people. No better than the very landlady whose rooms they occupied, and whom a day back she looked on as a separate and but dimly understood creation.

In the middle of the day there was a light lunch, at which Mrs. Grace made nothing of the disappointment of the morning, and Edith passed the subject almost silently. Then the afternoon dragged on through all the inexhaustible sunlight to dinner, and each woman felt a great sense of relief when the meal arrived, for it marked the close of that black, blank day, and all the time between dinner and bed-time is but the twilight dawn of another day.

An after-dinner custom of the two ladies was that Mrs. Grace should sit in her easy chair at one side of the window in summer, and Edith at the other, while the girl read an evening paper aloud until the light failed or the old woman fell asleep.

It was eight o'clock, and still the unwearying light pursued and enveloped the hours pertinaciously. The great reflux of men had long since set in and died down low. Now and then a brisk footstep passed the window with sharp beating sound; now and then a long and echoing footfall lingered from end to end of the opposite flagway; now and then an empty four-wheeled cab lumbered sleepily by.

The fresh, low voice of the girl bodied forth the words clearly, but with no emotion or aid of inflection beyond the markings of the punctuation on the page. She had been accustomed to read certain parts of the paper in a particular order, and she began in this order and went on. The words she read and uttered conveyed no meaning to her own mind, and if at any moment she had been stopped and asked what was the subject of the article, she would have been obliged to wait and trust to the unconsciously-record-

ing memory of her ear for the words her voice had uttered.

The old woman's eyes were open. She was broad awake, but not listening to a word that Edith read. The girl's voice had a pleasing soothing effect, and she was sadly fancying how they two could manage to live on the narrow means now adjudged to her by fate.

Suddenly there was a sharper, brisker sound than usual in the street. The old woman awoke to observation. The sound approached rapidly, and suddenly stopped close at hand with the harsh tearing noise of a wheel-tire grating along the curbstone. Mrs. Grace leaned forward and looked out of the window. A hansom cab had drawn up at the door, and a man was alighting.

"There's the gentleman who was here yesterday with Mr. Leigh," said Mrs. Grace drawing back from the window.

Edith paused a moment, and then went on reading aloud in the same mechanical voice as before.

"I wonder could he have forgotten his gloves or his cane yesterday?" said Mrs. Grace, whose curiosity was slightly aroused. Any excitement, however slight, would be welcome now.

"I don't know, mother. If he forgot anything he must have left it downstairs. I saw nothing here, and I heard of nothing."

"If you please, Mrs. Grace, Mr. Hanbury has called and wishes to see you," said the landlady's daughter from the door of the room.

"Mr. Hanbury wants to see me!" said the old lady in astonishment. "Will you kindly ask him to walk up? Don't stir, darling," she said as Edith rose to go. "No doubt he brings some message from Mr. Leigh."

With a listless sigh the young girl sank back upon her chair in the window-place.

"Mr. Hanbury, ma'am," said the landlady's daughter from the door, as the young man, looking hot and excited, stepped into the room, drew up and bowed to the two ladies.

"I feel," said the young man, as the door was closed behind him, "that this is a most unreasonable hour for a

visit of one you saw for the first time, yesterday, Mrs. Grace; but last night I made a most astounding discovery about myself, and to-day I made a very surprising discovery about you."

"Pray, sit down," said the old lady graciously, "and tell us what these discoveries are. But discovery or no discovery I am glad to see you. A visit from the distinguished Mr. Hanbury would be an honour to any house in London."

The young man bowed and sat down. In manner he was restless and excited. He glanced from one of the women to the other quickly, and with flashing eyes.

Edith leaned back on her chair, and looked at the visitor. He was sitting between the two a little back from the window, so that the full light of eight o'clock in midsummer fell upon him. The girl could in no way imagine what discovery of this impetuous, stalwart, gifted young man could interest them.

"You see, Mrs. Grace," he said, looking rapidly again from one to the other, "I have just come back from the country where I had to go on an affair of my own. An hour or two ago I got back to London, and after seeing my mother and speaking to her awhile I came on here to you."

"Are all men impudent," thought Edith, "like Leigh and this one. What have we to do with him or his mother, or his visit to the country?"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Grace. "I know. I understand. You've been to Millway and Eltham House with Mr. Leigh, and you have been kind enough to bring us news of my grand-daughter's luggage."

"Eh? What?" He looked in astonishment from one to the other.

"Are all men," thought Edith indignantly. "so pushing, and impudent, and interfering? What insolence of this man to call at such an hour about my luggage!"

"Eltham House? Millway? Miss Grace's luggage? Believe me, I do not understand." Again his eyes wandered in confused amazement from one to the other.

"My grand-daughter left Mr. Leigh's house early yesterday morning and did not bring her luggage with her," said the old woman severely. "If you have not called on

behalf of Mr. Leigh about the luggage, may I ask to what you are referring when you say you have been to the country and found out something of interest to me?"

"But I have not said I have been to Mr. Leigh's place in the country. May I ask you where it is?"

"Near Millway, on the south coast; Sussex, I think."

"I don't know where Millway is. I have never been there; I have not come from the south. I have been in the Midlands since I had the pleasure of seeing you yesterday."

"The Midlands? The Midlands?" said the old woman, leaning forward and looking at him keenly.

Edith's face changed almost imperceptibly. She showed a faint trace of interest.

"Yes; I have just come back from Derbyshire. You are interested in Derbyshire, aren't you?"

"Go on," said the old woman eagerly. She was now trembling, and caught the arms of her easy chair to steady her hands.

"In Derbyshire I had occasion to visit Castleton, and there I met a Mr. Couth, who said he had been in communication with you respecting your family—the Graces of Gracedieu, in the neighbourhood of Castleton."

"Yes, yes," said the old woman impatiently. "That is quite right. I had a letter from Mr. Couth this morning, saying the Graces had left the place long ago, and owned no property in the place. Have you any other—any better news?"

"Not respecting the Graces and Gracedieu, as far as your questions go."

"Oh," said the old woman, and with a sigh she sank back in the chair, her interest gone. "The Graces are a Derbyshire family, and as my grand-daughter has just lost all her little fortune, I was anxious to know if there were any traces of her people in Derbyshire still."

The eyes of the man moved to the girl and rested on her.

"I am sorry to hear Miss Grace has lost her fortune," he said softly. "Very sorry indeed."

"It was not very much," said the old woman, becoming garrulous and taking it for granted Hanbury was an intimate

friend of Leigh's and knew all the dwarf's affairs, "and the loss of it was what made my grand-daughter accept the companionship to old Mrs. Leigh down at Eltham House, near Millway. Miss Grace could not endure Mr. Leigh, and left, without her luggage, a few hours after arriving there. That was why I thought you came about Miss Grace's luggage."

"Miss Grace a companion to Mr. Leigh's mother?" cried the young man in a tone of indignant protest. "What!" he thought. "This lovely creature mewed up in the same house with that little, unsightly creature?"

"Yes. But she stayed only a few hours. In fact she ran away, as no doubt your friend told you."

"Mr. Leigh told me absolutely nothing of the affair; and may I beg of you not to call him my friend? He told you I was a friend of his, but I never met him till yesterday, and I have no desire to meet him again. When he had the impudence to bring me here I did not know where I was coming, or whom I was coming to see. I beg of you, let me impress upon you, Mr. Leigh is no friend of mine, and let me ask you to leave him out of your mind for a little while. The matter that brings me here now has nothing to do with him. I have come this time to talk about the Grace family, and I hope you will not think my visit impertinent, though the hour is late for a call."

"Certainly not impertinent. I am glad to see you again, Mr. Hanbury, particularly as you tell me that odious man is no friend of yours."

"You are very kind," said the young man, with no expression on his face corresponding with the words. "Mr. Couth, the attorney of Castleton, told me that a few weeks ago you caused inquiries to be made in his neighbourhood respecting the Grace family. Now it so happened that this morning, before London was awake, I started for Castleton to make inquiries about the Grace family."

"What, you, Mr. Hanbury! Are you interested in the Grace family?" enquired the old woman vivaciously.

"Intensely," he answered, moving uneasily on his chair. He dreaded another interruption.

Edith Grace saw now that Hanbury was greatly excited. She put out her hand gently and laid it soothingly on her

grandmother's hand as it rested on the arm of the chair. This young man was not nearly so objectionable as the other man, and he had almost as much as said he hated Leigh, a thing in itself to commend him to her good opinion. It was best to hear in quiet whatever he had to tell.

"Yes, my child," said Mrs. Grace, responding to the touch of the girl's hand, "I am most anxious to hear Mr. Hanbury."

"When I had the pleasure of seeing you yesterday I did not take more interest in Castleton than any other out-of-the-way English town of which I knew nothing, and my only interest in your family was confined to the two ladies in this room. Last night a document was given me by my mother, and upon reading it, I conceived the most intense interest in Castleton and Gracedieu and the family which gave that place a name."

He was very elaborate, and seemed resolved upon telling his story in a way he had arranged, for his eyes were not so much concerned with Mrs. Grace and Edith as with an internal scroll from which he was reading slowly and carefully.

"I went to Derbyshire this morning to see Gracedieu and to make inquiries as to a branch of the Grace family."

"And you, like me, have found out that there is no trace of the other branch," said the widow sadly. "You found out from Mr. Coutch that there were my grand-daughter and myself and no clue to any one else."

"Pardon me. I found out all I wanted."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Grace, sitting up in her chair and becoming once more intensely interested. "You found out about the other branch?"

"Yes, I found out all about the other branch."

"And where—where are they? Who are they? What is the name?" cried the old woman in tremulous excitement.

"The other branch is represented by Miss Grace, here," said Hanbury, softly laying his hand on the girl's hand as it rested on the old woman's.

"What? What? I don't understand you! We are the Graces of Gracedieu, or rather my husband and son

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were, and my grand-daughter is. There was no difficulty in finding out us. The difficulty was to find out the descendants of Kate Grace, who married a French nobleman in the middle of the last century."

He rose, and bending over the girl's hand raised it to his lips and kissed it, saying in a low voice, deeply shaken: "I am the only descendant of Kate Grace, who, in the middle of the last century, married Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, called Stanislaus the Second, King of Poland."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF DAY.

EDITH sprang from her chair trembling, abashed, overwhelmed. Mrs. Grace fell back and stared at Hanbury. It was not a moment for coherent thought or reasonable words. Even John Hanbury was as much overcome as though the discovery came upon him then for the first time. He felt more inclined for action than for words, and thought was out of the question. He would have liked to jump upon a horse and ride anywhere for life. He would have liked to plunge into a tumultuous river and battle with the flood. The sight of lives imperilled by fire, and rescue possible through him alone, would have afforded a quieting relief in desperate and daring effort.

In his own room, the night before, when he came upon this astounding news in his father's letter, the discovery brought only dreams and visions, echoing voices of the past, and marvellous views of glories and pageantries, splendours and infamies, a feeble ancestor and a despoiled nation.

Now, here was the first effect of declaring his awful kinship to the outside world. His mother's was he, and what was his glory, or infamy of name, was hers; although she was not of the blood. He knew that whatever he was, she was that also, body and soul. But here were two women, one of whom was allied to his race, though stranger to his blood; and the other of whom was re-

motely his cousin, whose ancestor had been the sister of a king's wife, and he, the descendant of that king. This young girl was kin, though not kind, they were of the half-blood. Revealing his parentage to these two women, was as though he assumed the shadowy crown of kingship in a council of his kinsfolk, conferring and receiving homage.

A king! Descended from a king!

How had his mind shifted and wavered, uncertain. How had his aspirations now fixed on one peak, now on another, until he felt in doubt as to whether there were any stable principle in his whole nature. How had his spirit now sympathised with the stern splendours of war, and now with the ennobling glories of peace. How had he trembled for the rights of the savage, and weighed the consideration that civilization, not mere man, was the only thing to be counted of value. How had he felt his pulses throb at the thought of the lofty and etherealizing privileges of the upper classes, and sworn that Christ's theory of charity to the poor, and fellowship with the simple and humble, was the only way of tasting heaven, and acting God's will while on earth. Had all these mutations, these dizzying and distracting vacillations, been only the stirring of the kingly principle in his veins?

After many meaningless exclamations and wide questions by Mrs. Grace, and a few replies from Hanbury, the latter said, "I think the best thing I can do is to tell you all I know, as briefly as possible."

"That will be the best," said Mrs. Grace. "But if the man who married Kate Grace was a Pole, how did they come to call him a Frenchman?"

"No doubt he used French here in England, as being the most convenient language for one who did not know English. Remember, he was a private gentleman then."

"I thought you said he was a count?"

"Well, yes, of course he was a count; but I meant, he had no public position such as he afterwards held, nor had he any hopes of being more than plain Count Poniatowski."

"Oh, I see. Then may we hear the story?" She settled herself back in her chair, taking the hand of her

grand-daughter into the safe keeping and affectionate clasp of both her hands.

"Towards the end of the first half of the eighteenth century, Count Poniatowski, son of a Lithuanian nobleman, came to England. He was a man of great personal beauty and accomplishments. While he was in this country he made the acquaintance of Sir Hanbury Williams, and became a favourite with that poet and diplomatist. When Sir Hanbury went as Ambassador to St. Petersburg, he took the young nobleman with him. In the Russian capital, he attracted the attention of the Grand Duchess Catherine. When she came to the Russian throne—when King Augustus III. of Poland died, in 1764—Catherine, now Empress—used her influence to such effect, that Stanislaus was elected King of Poland. He was then thirty-two years of age. It was under this unfortunate king that the infamous partition of Poland took place, and the kingdom was abolished. Russia, Austria and Germany now own the country over which Stanislaus once reigned."

"And how about Kate Grace?" asked the widow in a low voice.

"I am coming to that, as you may imagine, but I wanted first to tell you who this man was. Well, Stanislaus spent a good while in England, and among other places that he went to was Derbyshire, and there, while staying in the neighbourhood with a gentleman, a friend of Sir Hanbury Williams, he saw and fell in love with Kate Grace, the beauty of the place in those times. He made love to her, and she ran away with him, and was married to him in the name of Augustus Hanbury, in the town of Derby, as the parish Register, my father says, shows to this day. Subsequently she came to London and lived with him as his wife, but under the name of Hanbury. He sent a substantial sum of money to his father-in-law, and an assurance that Kate had been legally married, but that, for family reasons, he could not acknowledge his wife just then, but would later. Subsequently he went to Russia in the train of his friend, Sir Hanbury Williams, leaving behind him his wife and infant son comfortably provided for. He had not been long in St. Petersburg when his King, Augustus III. of Poland, recalled him to that kingdom.

Meanwhile, his wife, Kate Grace that had been, died; they said of a broken heart. Young Stanislaus Hanbury, the son of this marriage, was taken charge of by one of the Williams family, and when Stanislaus became King of Poland, he sent further moneys to the Graces, and to provide for his son, Stanislaus. But the Graces never knew exactly the man their daughter had married. They were quite sure she was legally married, and had no difficulty in taking the money Stanislaus sent them. They were under the impression their daughter had gone to France, that she died early, and that she left no child."

"It is a most wonderful and romantic history," said the old woman in a dazed way. The story had seemed to recede from her and hers, and to be no more to her than a record of things done in China a thousand years ago. The remote contact of her grand-daughter with the robes of a crowned King, had for the time numbed her faculties. It seemed as though the girl, upon the mere recital, must have suffered a change, and that it would be necessary to readjust the relations between them.

Edith did not say anything. She merely pressed the under one of the two hands that held hers.

"A very romantic history," said the visitor, "I have now told you whom Kate Grace married. She married a man who, after her death, sat thirty years on the throne of Poland, and was alive when that kingdom ceased to exist. *What* this man was I will not say. It is not my place, as a descendant of his, to tell his story. It has been told by many. I know little of it, but what I know is far from creditable to him. Remember, I never had my attention particularly directed to Stanislaus the Second, or Poland, until last night, and since then I have been enquiring after the living, and not unearthing the records of the dead."

"And you never even suspected anything of this until last night?" said Mrs. Grace, who now began slowly to recover the use of the ordinary faculties of the mind.

"Never. Nor did my mother. In the long paper my father left in charge of my mother he says he only heard the facts from some descendant of Sir Hanbury Williams. When he found out who he really was he seemed to have

been seized with a positive horror of the blood in his veins, not because of what it had done in the past, but of what it might do in the future. He was a careful, timid man. He thought the best way to kill the seed of ambition in the veins of a Hanbury would be to reduce the position of the family from that of people of independent means to that of traders. Hence he went into business in the City; although he had no need of more money, he made a second fortune. He says his theory was that, in these days, no man who ever made up parcels of tea, or offered hides for sale, could aspire to a throne, and that no man of business who was doing well at home, ever became a conspirator abroad. When he saw I was taking a great interest in the struggles of parties in France, he thought the best thing he could do would be to let me know who I was, and leave me his opinion as to the folly of risking anything in a foreign cause, when one could find ample opportunity of employing one's public spirit usefully in England, for notwithstanding his foreign blood, my father was an Englishman with Englishmen against all the world. His instructions to my mother were, that if, at any time, I showed signs of abandoning myself to excess in politics, I was to get the paper, for if I leaned too much to the people the knowledge that I had the blood of a King in me might modify my ardour; and if I seemed likely to adopt the cause of any foreign ruler or pretender, I might be restrained by a knowledge that, as far as the experience of one of my ancestors went, unwelcome rulers meant personal misery and national ruin."

"And, Mr. Hanbury, what do you propose doing? Do you intend changing your name and claiming your rights?"

"The only rights I have are those common to every Englishman. The name I have worn I shall continue to wear. Though my great grandfather's grandfather was for more than thirty years a king, there is not now a rood of ground for his descendants to lord it over. This marriage of Stanislaus Poniatowski with Kate Grace has been kept secret up to this. Now I wish to bind you and Miss Grace to secrecy for the future. I have told you the history of the past in order, not to glorify the past and magnify the Hanburys, but in order to establish between you two, and my

mother and myself, the friendly relations which ought to exist between kith and kin. You are the last left of your line and we of ours. To divulge to the public what I have told you now would be to expose us to ridicule. I came here yesterday in the design of saving myself from ridicule a thousand times less than would follow if any one said I set up claims to be descended from a king. I will tell you the story of yesterday another time. Anyway, I hope I have made out this evening that we are related. I know, if you will allow it, we shall become friends. As earnest of our friendship will you give me your hands?"

The old woman held out hers with the young girl's in it and Hanbury stood up and bent and kissed the two hands.

Then Mrs. Grace began to cry and sob. It was strange to meet a kinsman of her dead husband, and her son, and her son's child, so late in her life, and it comforted her beyond containing herself, so she sobbed on in gratitude.

"My mother, who is the greatest-hearted woman alive, will come and see you both to-morrow. Fortunately all the Stanislaus or Grace, or Hanbury, money was not in rotten banks, and as long as English Consols hold their own there will be no need to seek a fortune in Millway or any other part of Sussex. Edith, my cousin, I may call you Edith?" he asked, gently taking her hand.

"If it pleases you," she said, speaking for the first time. She had felt inclined to say "Sir," or "My Lord," or even "Sire." She had been looking in mute astonishment at the being before her. She, who had more respect for birth than for power, or wealth, or genius, had sat there listening to the speech of this man as he referred to his origin in an old nobility, and related the spreading splendours of his forefathers blossoming into kingly honours, regal state! There, sitting before her, at the close of this dull day of disenchantment and sordid cares, was set a man who was heir not only to an ancient title in Poland, but to the man who had sat, the last man who had sat, in the royal chair of that historic land. Her heart swelled with a rapture that was above pride, for it was unselfish. It was the intoxicating joy one has in knowledge of something outside and beyond one's self, as in the magnitude of space, the immensities of the innumerable suns of the heavens, the ineffable tribute of

the flowery earth to the sun of summer. Her spirit rose to respect, veneration, awe. What were the tinsel glories she had until that morning attributed to her own house, compared with the imperial, solid, golden magnificence of his race. Nothing. No better than the obscure shadows of the forgotten moon compared with the present and insistent effulgence of the zenith sun.

And, intolerable thought! the blood of this man had been allied with the humble stream flowing in her veins, and he was calling her cousin, and kissing her hand, he standing while she sat! instead of her kneeling to kiss his hand and render him homage!

"My lord and my king," she thought. "Yes, my king. After a joy such as this, the rest of life must seem a desert. After this night I shall desire to live no more. I, who thought myself noble because I came of an untitled soldier of the Conqueror's, am claimed as cousin by the son of one who ruled in his country as William himself ruled in England, from the throne!"

"And we shall be good friends," Hanbury said, smiling upon her.

"Yes," she said, having no hope or desire for better acquaintance with the king in her heart, for who could be friends with her king, even though there were remote ties of blood between them?

He caught the tone of doubt in the voice, and misconstrued it. "You will not be so unkind, so unjust, as to visit my intrusion of yesterday upon me?"

"No." How should one speak to a king when one could not use the common titles or forms?

"You must know that the man I came with yesterday told me if I accompanied him he would show me something more wonderful than miracle gold."

"Yes," she said, for he paused, and her answer by some word or note was necessary to show she was hearkening.

"And I came and saw you, Edith, but did not then know you were my cousin, nor did you dream it?"

"No."

"You are the only relative I have living, except my mother, and you will try and not be distant and cold with me?"

"Yes, I will try." But in the tone there was more than doubt.

"And you will call me John or Jack?"

"Oh!—no—no—no!" She slipped from her chair and knelt close to where he stood.

"Are you faint?" he cried, bending over her anxiously.

"I am better now," she said, rising.

Unknown to him she had stooped and kissed his hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW RELATIVES.

WHEN John Hanbury turned his face homeward to Chester Square from Grimsby Street that evening, the long summer day was at last ended, and it was dusk.

He had, before setting out for the country that morning, written a note to his mother explaining whither he was going, and left it with the document she had given him the night before. He wound up his note by telling her he was still, even after the night, so confused and hurried in his thoughts that he would make no comment on the discovery except that it was one of the most extraordinary that had ever befallen man. He was going into the country to find what confirmation he could, if any, of the marvellous tale.

On getting back to London he had had a strange meeting with his mother. Both were profoundly moved, and each, out of mercy to the other, affected to be perfectly calm, and fell to discussing the new aspect of affairs as though the news into which they had just come was no more interesting than the ordinary surprises that awaken interest once a week in the quietest family. Beyond an embrace of more warmth and endurance than usual, there was no sign that anything very unusual had occurred since their last meeting. Then Mrs. Hanbury sat down, and her son as was his custom when excited, walked up and down the room as he told his Derbyshire experience.

"In a few hours," he went, on, after some introductory sentences, "I found out all that is to be found out about the Graces near their former place, Gracedieu. It exactly corresponds with all my father says. The story of Kate Grace's disappearance and marriage to a foreign nobleman (by the tradition he is French), is still told in the place, and the shop in which her father formerly carried on his business in wool can still be pointed out, unaltered after a hundred and thirty years. There is Gracedieu itself, a small house in a garden, such as a man who had made money in trade in a country town would retire to. There is also the tradition that Grace, the wool dealer, did not make his money in trade, but came into it through his rich son-in-law, whose name is not even guessed at, the people there being content as a rule to describe him as a foreigner, while those who pride themselves on their accuracy, call him a Frenchman, and the entirely scrupulous say he was a French count."

"And do these Graces still live at Gracedieu, John?"

"No, mother. They left it years ago—generations ago. And now I want to tell you a thing almost as incredible as the subject of my father's letter. No longer, since than yesterday I met, in London, the representative of these Graces, the only surviving descendant."

"That is truly astonishing," said Mrs. Hanbury. "Yesterday was a day of wonders."

"A day of miracles," said the young man thoughtfully.

For the first time in his life he had a secret from his mother, and he was at this moment in doubt as to whether he should impart to her, or not, all the circumstances of his going to Grimsby Street yesterday. He had no inclination to speak now of the quarrel or disagreement with Dora. That incident no longer occupied a front and illumined position in his mind. It was in a dim background, a quiet twilight.

"How did you come across them? What are they like?"

"I came across them quite by accident. It is much too long a tale to tell now. Indeed, it would take hours to tell fully, and I want not to lose any time at present."

"As you please, John. This is a day when wonders

come so quick that we lose all sense of their importance. Tell me just what you like. I am only concerned about one thing."

"And what is that, mother?" He asked in a troubled voice. He was afraid she was about to make some reference to Dora.

"That you do not allow yourself to become too excited or carried away," she said, with pleading solicitude.

He kissed her, and said cheerfully: "Trust me, mother, I am not going to lose my head or knock myself up. Well, when I met Mrs. and Miss Grace yesterday——"

"Oh, the representatives are women?"

"Yes, mother, and gentlewomen too; though I should think far from well off——"

"If," said Mrs. Hanbury promptly, "narrow circumstances are all the drawback they labour under that could be soon put right."

"God bless you, my good mother," cried the son with affectionate pride. "Well, when I saw them yesterday in their place in Grimsby Street I had, of course, no notion whatever that they were in any way related to us. I took no particular notice of them beyond observing that they were ladies. The strangest thing about them is that the younger is—is—is——" He hesitated, not knowing how much of yesterday's events must come out.

"What?" said the mother with a smile.

"Is, as I said, a perfect lady."

"Yes; but why do you hesitate?"

"Well, mother, I don't know how to put it," he laughed lightly, and coloured impatiently at his own blundering stupidity.

"I will help you. That the younger is fifty, wears cork-screw curls, and teaches the piano in that awful Grimsby Street. Never mind, John, I am not afraid of an old maid, even if you are."

"Good heavens! I don't mean that, mother! I'll put it in this way. It is not to say that there is a strong likeness, but, if you saw Miss Grace, you would be prepared to swear it was Miss Ashton."

"What? So like Dora Ashton! Then, indeed, she must be not only ladylike but a beauty as well."

"The two would be, I think, quite indistinguishable to the eye, anyway. The voices are not the same."

"Now, indeed, you do interest me. And was it because of this extraordinary resemblance you sought the young lady's acquaintance?"

"Well, as I said, it is too long a story, much too long a story to tell now. I did not seek the lady's acquaintance. A man who knew us both, and whom I met yesterday by accident, was so struck by the similarity between Miss Ashton and Miss Grace that he insisted upon my going with him to the house of this Mrs. Grace."

"Oh, I understand. You were at Mrs. Ashton's Thursday, met some man there, and he carried you off. Upon my word you seem to be in a whirl of romances," she said gaily.

"That was not exactly the way the thing arose. The man who introduced me was at Ashton's, but we shall have the whole story out another day."

"Then what do you think of doing now? You seem in a great hurry."

"I'm not, mother, in a great hurry anywhere in particular."

"You, of course, are wishing to run away to Curzon Street?"

"No. They are not at home this evening. Mrs. Ashton said they were 'to dine at Byngfields'. I am in a hurry, but in a hurry nowhere. I am simply in a blaze of excitement, as you may imagine." He paused, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. The worst was over. There had been a reference to Dora and no explanation, a thing he wished to avoid at any expense just now. There had been a statement that he had met the Graces, and no mention of Leigh. His mind had been in a wild whirl. He had in the first burst of his interview with his mother magnified to himself the unpleasant episodes of yesterday, as far as Leigh was concerned at all events. Now he was more at rest. He had got breathing space, and he could between this and the next reference decide upon the course he should pursue in that most uncomfortable affair. There would be ample excuse for almost any irregularity on his part with regard to her in the amazing news which had

come upon him. His mind was calmer and more unclouded now.

"Well, perhaps if you talk to me a while you may grow cooler. Tell me anything you like or nothing. You will wear yourself out, John, if you don't take care. To judge from your father's letter to you he attached no practical importance to the secret it contained, and the only object he had in communicating it was to keep you still. It has had so far an effect the very opposite of what he desired."

"I know I am very excitable. I will try to be more calm. Let me see. What can we talk about? Of course I can neither think nor speak about anything which does not bear on the disclosure."

"Tell me then what you heard of the Graces in Derbyshire, and why you think them not well off. That may have a practical use, and will take your mind off your own place in the affair."

"Oh! yes. Well, you see Castleton isn't a very big place, and Mr. Coutch is the most important professional man in it, so I found my way to him, and he told me he had been making inquiries for a widow and her granddaughter who lived in London, and I asked where they lived and so on, and found out that Mrs. Grace who was making the inquiries was the very Mrs. Grace I had met yesterday. I told Coutch that I was the person he was looking for, that I represented the other branch of the Grace family, and that I was most anxious to befriend my relatives by giving them what information they might desire. I did not say anything to him about the Polish affair, or the man whom Kate Grace had married, beyond informing Coutch that he had not been a French nobleman, and that I was a descendant of that marriage.

"Then he told me he feared from what his London correspondent had written him that the Graces were in distress, or anyway were far from well off, as Mrs. Grace had lately lost a large sum of money, and Miss Grace every penny she had in the world. His correspondent said he thought the only object of the inquiry was to find out if by any chance there might be ever so remote a chance of tracing the other branch of the family with a view to finding out if by will or failure of that line some

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property might remain to those who bore the name of Grace, and were direct in the line of the wool-dealer of the eighteenth century. I then told him that I was not either exactly poor or rich, and that I would be most happy to do anything in my power for my distant relatives. He said that there was not even a trace of property in his neighbourhood to which either of the branches had the shadow of a claim, as Gracedieu had generations ago passed away from the family by sale, and they had never owned anything else there."

"I am delighted you told this man we would be happy to be of any use we could to this poor old lady, and her grand-daughter. Of course, John, in this case you must not do anything in which I am not a sharer. All I have will be yours legally one day, and in the mean time is yours with my whole heart and soul. Apart altogether from my desire to aid in this matter because these people are your people, it would, of course, be my duty to do so, because they are your dead father's people. You own you are restless. Why not go to them and tell them all? Say they have friends and well-wishers in us, and that I will call upon them to-morrow."

So mother and son parted, and he went to Grimsby Street. He had left Chester Square in a comparatively quiet state of mind, but as he drove in the hansom his imagination took fire once more, and when he found himself in Mrs. Grace's sitting-room he was highly excited.

When he returned to Chester Square he sought his mother's room. He found her sitting alone in the twilight. In a hasty way he described the interview between himself, Mrs. and Miss Grace, and said he had conveyed his mother's promise of a visit the next day.

Then he said: "Do you know, I think we had better keep all this to ourselves?"

"I am glad, my son, you are of that opinion. Up to this I have spoken to no one, not even to your aunt Preston or Sir Edward, who were here to-day. I don't remember ever having heard that the Hanburys were related to people called Grace, and I suppose if I did not hear it no one among our friends did. I hope you cautioned Mrs. and Miss Grace. But, remember, John,

this is not wholly our secret. It is theirs quite as much, if not more, than ours. All we can do for the present is to keep our own tongues quiet."

"I am sure you will like Mrs. and Miss Grace. They are very quiet people and took my news very well. Good news or news of this kind tries people a great deal more than calamitous news. They seem to be simple and well-bred."

"Well, when people are simple and well-bred, and good-natured, and not selfish——"

"I think they are all that," he interjected.

"There is no merit in getting on with them. The only thing to consider John, is, will they get on with me? Am I to be got on with by them?"

"Why, my mother would get on with the most disagreeable women ever known."

"Yes, but then these two may not be the most disagreeable. At all events I'll do my best. Do you intend staying in or are you going to the club or to Curzon Street?"

"The Curzon Street people are dining out at Byngfields' as I told you earlier in the day. I am too restless to stay in the house and the club seems too trivial for an evening like this. I think I'll go out and walk to that most delightful of all places."

"Where is that?"

"Nowhere in particular. I am too tired and excited to decide upon anything to-night. I'll just go for a stroll and think about nothing at all. I'll say good night, as I may not be back early."

And so mother and son parted.

He left the house. It was almost dark. He wandered on in an easterly direction, not caring or heeding where he went. He tried to keep his mind from hurrying by walking at a leisurely rate, and he tried to persuade himself he was thinking of nothing by employing his eyes actively on all things that came in his way as he strolled along. But this device was only an attempt and scarcely a sincere attempt.

"A king," he would think, insensibly holding his head high; "one of my people, my great grandfather's grand-

father, has been king of an old monarchy and millions of men. It is a long time ago, no doubt, but what does all blood pride itself upon if not former splendours? A king! And the king of no miserable Balkan state or Christian fragment of the Turkish empire, but a king of an ancient and powerful state which stood powerful and stubborn in the heart of fierce, military, warlike Europe and held its own! Poniatowski was no doubt an elected king, but so were the others, and he was a Lithuanian nobleman before he became King. The kingdom over which he ruled exists no longer except in history, and even if the infamous partitions had never taken place and Stanislaus had owned his English marriage and taken his English family with him, I should have no more claim to the throne than to that of the Queen. But I am the lineal descendant of a king who reigned for a generation, and neither the malignity of to-day nor the lies of history can destroy that fact.

"Still the whole thing is, of course, only moonshine now, and if I went to Lithuania, to Wolczyn itself, they would laugh at my pretensions. The family estates and honours had been vapourized before that last of the Poniatowskis fell under Napoleon. So my father asserts, and he took some trouble to inquire. Therefore, no doubt it would be best to keep the whole thing secret. But can we?"

He put the thought away from him as having no immediate urgency. It would be best for him to think of nothing at all, but to watch the gas lamps and the people and the cabs and carriages hurrying through the free air of England.

But Dora? What of Dora? Dora had said good night to him and then good bye. He had behaved badly, shamefully, no doubt. There was no excuse for him or for any man allowing himself to be carried away by temper in speaking to a lady, above all in speaking to a lady whom he thought and intended to make his wife. Could Dora ever forgive him? It was more than doubtful. If she did, what assurance had he for the future? How would Dora take this discovery about the husband of Kate Grace in the eighteenth century? She would think little or nothing about it. She had no respect for hereditary honours

or for old blood. She judged all men by their deeds and by their deeds alone. Hence she had tolerated him, doubtless, when she believed him to be no more than the son of a City merchant possessing some abilities. She had tolerated him! It was intolerable to be tolerated! And by the woman he intended asking to be his wife.

He had asked her to be his wife and she had hung back because he had not yet done anything important, had not yet even taken up a well-defined position in politics.

If he told her to-night that he was descended from Stanislaus II. King of Poland she would not be impressed ever so little. He did not attach much importance to his old Lithuanian blood or the transient gleam of kingship which had shone upon his race. But there was, in spite of Dora, something in these things after all, or all the world was wrong.

Dora was really too matter-of-fact. No doubt the rank is but the guinea stamp and the man is the gold for all that. But in our complex civilization the stamp is very convenient; it saves the trouble of assaying and weighing every piece of yellow metal we are offered as gold, and Burns himself, in his letters at least, shows anything but this fierce democratic spirit. Why Burns' letters erred the other way, and were full of sickening tuft-hunting and sycophancy.

What a marvellous likeness there was between the appearance of those two young girls. Now, if anyone had said there was a remote cousinship between the girls all who saw would say cousinship! Sisterhood! No twins could be more alike. And yet the resemblance was only accidental.

He would like to see them together and compare them.

Like to see them together? Should he?

Well, no.

Dora was generous, there was no question of that; and she was not disposed to be in the least jealous. But she could scarcely help wondering how he felt towards another girl who was physically her counterpart and seemed to think more of blood and race.

It might occur to Dora to look at the likeness between herself and his cousin Edith in this way: To me John Hanbury is merely a young man of promising ability, who

may if he likes forward causes in which I take a great interest. I sometimes cross him and thwart him, but then he is my lover, and, though I despise rank, I am his social superior in England now anyway. How would it be with him if this young girl whose appearance is so like mine cares for him, apart from his abilities and possible usefulness in causes interesting to me, and sets great store by noble race and royal blood?

That would be an inquiry upon which Dora might not care to enter. Or it might be she would not care? Might it be she was glad to say good-bye?

"Perhaps Dora has begun to think she made a mistake in listening to me at all. After yesterday and my cowardly weakness and vacillation during the afternoon, and my unpardonable outburst after dinner, she may not care to send me away from her because she pities me! Good God! am I going to marry a woman who pities me?

"I will put Dora away from my thoughts for the present.

"The Graces must come to live with us, that's certain.

"Fancy that odious dwarf and Dora pitying me! I cannot bear the thought! I could not breathe five minutes in an atmosphere of pity. There are good points in my character, but I must take care of them or they might deteriorate into baseness. I must take care of myself, beware of myself. I am not perfect, I am not very vile. I should like to be a god. Let me try."

He had told his mother he was going Nowhere in particular. It was quite plain his reflections were bringing him no nearer to Curzon Street.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LEIGH AT HIS BENCH.

TOM STAMER was afraid of only two people, namely, John Timmons and the policeman. Of both he had experience. In his fear of Timmons were mingled love and admiration. No such diluting sentiments qualified his feelings towards the guardians of law and order. He had "done time," and

he did not want to do it again. He was a complete stranger to anything like moral cowardice. He had never even heard of that weakness by that name. He was a burglar and a thief without any code at all, except that he would take anything he wished to take, and he would die for John Timmons. He did not look on dying as a very serious thing. He regarded imprisonment as a monstrous calamity, out of all proportion to any other. He would not go out of his way to kill a policeman, but if one stood in his way he would kill him with as little compunction as much satisfaction as a terrier kills a rat. If up to the present his hands were clean of blood, it was because shedding it had never seemed to him at once expedient and safe. If he were made absolute king he would like to gather all the police of the kingdom into a yard with high walls and shoot them from a safe balcony.

Although his formulated code was limited to the two articles mentioned above, certain things he had not done wore the air of virtue. He never quarrelled with any man, he never ill-treated his wife, he never cheated anyone. When drunk he was invariably amiable and good-natured, and gave liberally to others. He was a completely loyal friend, and an enemy all the more merciless and horrible because he was without passion.

He had little or no mind, but he was on that account the more terribly steadfast. Once he had resolved upon a thing nothing could divert him from trying to accomplish it. His was one of those imperfect, half-made intellects that are the despair of philanthropists. You could do nothing whatever with him; he could rob and murder you. If he had all those policemen in that high-walled court he would not have inflicted any torture upon them. He would have shot them with his own hand merely to make sure the race was extirpated. His fidelity was that of an unreasoning beast. He knew many men of his own calling, and by all of them he was looked upon as being the most mild and true, and dangerous and deadly burglar in London. He was morally lower than the lowest of the uncorrupted brutes.

Stamer had made up his mind that Oscar Leigh was in league with the police, and that this postponement of buy-

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ing the gold from Timmons was merely part of some subtle plan to entrap Timmons and himself.

This conviction was his way of deciding upon taking Oscar Leigh's life. He did not even formulate the dwarf's death to himself. He had simply decided that Leigh meant to entrap Timmons in the interest of Scotland Yard. Timmons and himself were one.

Wait a week indeed, and be caught in a trap! Not he! Business was business, and no time was to be lost.

When he left Tunbridge Street that morning, he made straight for Chelsea. This was a class of business which did not oblige him to keep his head particularly clear. He would lay aside his ordinary avocation until this affair was finished. The weather was warm, so he turned into a public-house in the Vauxhall Bridge Road and sat down at a table to think the matter over while cooling and refreshing himself with a pint of beer.

One thing puzzled him. How was it that the dwarf pretended to be with Timmons half-a-mile away, at the time he himself, and half-a-dozen other men who knew Leigh's appearance thoroughly, saw him as plain as the sun at noonday winding up his clock at the second floor window of the house opposite the Hanover? There could, of course, not be the least doubt that Timmons had been deceived, imposed upon in some way. But how was it done? Timmons knew the dwarf well, knew his figure, which could not easily be mistaken, and knew his voice also. They had met several times before Timmons even broached the gold difficulty to him. Leigh had told Timmons that he was something of a magician. That he could do things no other man could do. That he had hidden knowledge of metals, and so on, and could do things no other man living could do with metals, and that he had books of fortune-telling and magic and the stars, and so on.

Stamer's education had been neglected. He had read little, and knew nothing of magic and these things, but he had heard it was only foolishness. Timmons was an honourable man and wouldn't lie. He had said the plan of getting rid of the gold was to be that Leigh was to pretend to make it and sell it openly or with very little secrecy. That was a good notion if Leigh could persuade people he

made it. Unfortunately gold could not be run into sovereigns. It had to be stamped cold and that could only be managed by machinery.

Well, anyway, if this man, this Leigh, knew a lot of hidden things he might know a lot about chloroform and laudanum and other drugs he heard much about but that did not come in his way of business. Leigh might know of or have invented something more sudden and powerful than chloroform and have asked Timmons to smell a bottle, or have waved a handkerchief in Timmons's face, and Timmons might have there and then gone off into a sleep and dreamed all he believed about the walk at midnight and the church clock.

That looked a perfectly reasonable and complete explanation. In fact it was the explanation and no other was needed. This was simplicity itself.

But what was the object of this hocusing of Timmons, and, having hocused the man, why didn't he rob him of the gold he had with him, or call the police? That was a question of nicer difficulty and would require more beer and a pipe. So far he was getting on famously, doing a splendid morning's work.

He made himself comfortable with his tobacco and beer and resumed where he had left off.

The reason why the dwarf didn't either take the gold or hand over Timmons to the police was because he hadn't all he wanted. When he got Timmons asleep he left him somewhere and went back to wind his clock just to show he wasn't up to anything. What was it Timmons hadn't? Why, papers, of course. Timmons hadn't any papers about Stamer or any of them, and the only thing Leigh would have against Timmons, if he gave him up then, would be the gold, out of which by itself they could make nothing! That was the whole secret! Leigh knew the time when Timmons would come to his senses to a minute, and had him out in the street half a mile from the house before he knew where he was.

If confirmation of this theory were required had not Timmons told him that Leigh carried a silver bottle always with him, and that he was ever sniffing up the contents of the bottle? Might not he carry another bottle the contents

of which, when breathed even once, were more powerful, ten times more powerful, than chloroform?

This explanation admitted of no doubt or even question. But if a clincher were needed, was it not afforded by what he had heard the landlord and frequenters of the Hanover say last night about this man's clock? They said that when the clock was wound up by night the winding up *always* took place in the half hour between midnight and half-past twelve, and furthermore that on no occasion but one, and that one when Leigh was out of town, that one and singular occasion being the night before his visit to the Hanover, had a soul but the dwarf been seen in the clock room or admitted to it.

This affair must be looked after at once. It admitted of no delay. He would go to the Hanover and early enough to try some of their rum hot, of which he had heard such praises last night.

This was the substance of Stamer's thinking, though not the words of his thought.

On his way to Chetwynd Street he thought:

"He wants to get evidence against Timmons, and he wants to get evidence against *me* for the police. If he doesn't get it from Timmons's pockets next Thursday, he'll get it some other way soon, and then Timmons and I will be locked up. That must be prevented. He is too clever for an honest, straightforward man like Timmons. It isn't right to have a man like that prying into things and disturbing things. It isn't right, and it isn't fair, and it must be stopped, and it shall be stopped soon, or my name isn't Tom Stamer. I may make pretty free in this get-up. It belonged to a broken-down bailiff, and I think I look as like a broken-down bailiff as need be. When Timmons didn't guess who I was, I don't think anyone else will know, even if I met a dozen of the detectives."

He was in no hurry. He judged it to be still early for the Hanover. He wanted to go there when people were in the private bar, some time about the dinner hour would be the best part of the day for his purpose, and it was now getting near that time.

When he reached Welbeck Place he entered the private bar of the Hanover, and perching himself by the counter

opposite the door, on one of the high stools, asked for some rum hot. There was no one in this compartment. The potman served him. As a rule Williams himself attended to the private compartment, but he was at present seated on a chair in the middle of the bar, reading a newspaper. He looked up on the entrance of Stamer, and seeing only a low-sized man, in very seedy black, and wearing blue spectacles, he called out to Tom to serve the gentleman.

Mr. Stamer paid for his steaming rum, tasted it, placed the glass conveniently at his right elbow, lit his pipe, and stretched himself to show he was quite at his ease, about to enjoy himself, and in no hurry. Then he took off his blue spectacles, and while he wiped the glasses very carefully, looked around and about him, and across the street at the gable of Forbes's bakery, with his naked eyes.

He saw with satisfaction that Oscar Leigh was sitting at the top window opposite, working away with a file on something held in a little vice fixed on his clockmaker's bench.

Oscar Leigh, at his bench in the top room of Forbes's bakery, overlooking Welbeck Place, was filing vigorously a bar of brass held in a little vice attached to the bench. He was unconscious that anyone was watching him. He was unconscious that the file was in his hand, and that the part of the bar on which he was working gradually grew flatter and flatter beneath the fretting rancour of the file. He was at work from habit, and thinking from habit, but his inattention to the result of his mechanical labour was unusual, and the thoughts which occupied him were far away from the necessities of his craft.

When he put the rod in the vice, and touched its dull yellow skin into glittering ribs and points sparkling like gold, he had had a purpose in his mind for that rod. Now he had shaved it down flat, and the rod and the purpose for which it had been intended were forgotten. The brazen dust lay like a new-fallen Danæe shower upon the bench before him, upon his grimy hands, upon his apron. He was watching the delicate sparkling yellow rain as it fell from the teeth of inexorable steel.

Oscar Leigh was thinking of gold—Miracle Gold.

Stamer had resumed his blue spectacles. He was

furtively watching out of the corners of his eyes behind the blue glasses the man at the window above. He too was thinking of a metal, but not of the regal, the imperial yellow monarch of the Plutonian realms, but of a livid, dull, deadly, poisonous metal—lead, murderous lead.

The gold-coloured dust fell from the dwarf's file like a thin, down-driven spirt of auriferous vapour.

"Miracle Gold," he thought, "Miracle Gold. All gold is Miracle Gold when one tests it by that only great reagent, the world. The world, the world. In my Miracle Gold there would be found an alloy of copper and silver. Yes, a sad and poisonous alloy. Copper is blood-red, and silver is virgin white, and gold is yellow, a colour between the two, and infinitely more precious than they, the most precious of all metals is gold.

"The men who sought for the elixir of life sought also for the philosopher's stone. They placed indefinite prolongation of life and transmutation of the baser metals into gold side by side in importance. And all the time they were burying in their own graves their own little capital of life; they were missing all the gold of existence!

"They ceaselessly sought for endless life and found nothing but the end of the little life which had been given them! They ceaselessly sought to make gold while gold was being made all round them in prodigal confusion! They seared up their eyes with the flames of furnaces and the fumes of brass, to make another thing the colour of flame, the colour of brass! Was there no gold made by the sunlight or the motion of men's hearts?

"I cannot make this Miracle Gold. I can pretend to make it and put the fruit of violence and rapine abroad as fruit of the garden of the Hesperides. The world will applaud the man who has climbed the wall and robbed the garden of the Hesperides, providing that wall is not in London, or England, or the British Empire.

"I am not thinking of making this gold for profit; but for fame; for fame or infamy?

"I am in no want of money, as the poor are in want of money, and I do not value money as the rich value it. From my Miracle Gold I want the fame of the miracle, not the profit of the gold. But why should I labour and run

risk for the philosopher's stone, when I am not greedy of pelf? For the distinction: For the glory.

"Mine is a starved life and I must make the food nature denies me.

"But is this food to be found in the crucible? or on the filter?

"I am out of gear with life, but that is no reason why I should invent a dangerous movement merely to set me going in harmony with something that is still more out of gear with life.

"The elixir of life is not what is poured into life, but what is poured out of it. We are not rich by what we get, but by what we give. Tithonus lived until he prayed for death.

"And Midas starved. He would have given all the gold in the world for a little bread and wine or for the touch of a hand that did not harden on his shoulder.

"Here is a golden shower from this brass bar.

"Miracle Gold! Miracle Gold does not need making at my hands. It is made by the hands of others for all who will stretch forth their hands and take it. It is ready made in the palm of every hand that touches yours in friendship. It is the light of every kindly eye.

"It is on the lips of love for lovers.

"One touch of God's alchemy could make it even in the breast of a hunchback if it might seem sweet to one of God's angels to find it there!"

He dropped the file, swept the golden snow from the bench, rose and shook from his clothes the shower of golden sparks of brass. Then he worked his intricate way deftly through the body of the clock and locking the door of the clock-room behind him, descended the stairs and crossed Welbeck Place to the Hanover public-house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

STRONG SMELLING SALTS.

STAMER had by this time been provided with a second glass of the Hanover's famous rum hot. Mr. Williams,

the proprietor was still immersed in his newspaper, although Stamer's implied appreciation of the hot rum, in the order of a second glass, had almost melted the host into the benignity of conversation with the shabby-looking stranger. On the appearance of the dwarf, Williams rose briskly from his chair and greeted the new-comer cordially. Stamer did not stir beyond drawing back a little on his stool. Out of his blue spectacles he fixed a steady and cat-like gaze upon Leigh.

"How warm the weather keeps," said Leigh, climbing to the top of a stool, with his back to the door of the compartment and directly opposite Stamer. Even at the expense of getting more dust than I can manage well with, I think I must leave my window open," pointing upwards to the clock-room. "The place is suffocating. Hah! Suffocating."

"Why don't you get a fine muslin blind and then you could leave the window open, particularly if you wet the blind."

"There's something in that, Mr. Williams; there's a great deal in what you say, Mr. Williams. But, you see, the water would dry off very soon in this broiling weather, and then the dust would come through. But if I soaked the blind in oil, a non-drying oil, it would catch all the dust and insects. Dust is as bad for my clock as steel filings from a stone are for the lungs of a Sheffield grinder. Hah! Yes, I must get some gauze and steep it in oil. Would you lend me the potman for a few minutes? He would know what I want and I am rather tired for shopping."

"Certainly, with pleasure, Mr. Leigh. Here, Binns, just put on your coat and run on an errand for Mr. Leigh, will you?"

The potman who was serving the only customer in the public bar appeared, got his instructions and money from the clock-maker and skipped off with smiling alacrity. The little man was open-handed in such matters.

"Yes; the place is bad enough in the daytime," went on Leigh as he was handed a glass of shandy-gaff, "but at night when the gas is lighted it becomes choking simply."

"It's a good job you haven't to stay there long at night. No more than half-an-hour with the gas on."

"Yes, about half-an-hour does for winding up. But

then "I sometimes come there when you are all in bed. I often get up in the middle of the night persuaded something has gone wrong. I begin to wonder if that clock will get the better of me and start doing something on its own account."

"It's twice too much to have on your mind all by yourself. Why don't you take in a partner?" asked Williams sympathetically, "or," he added, "give it up altogether if you find it too much for you?" If Leigh gave up his miserable clock, Leigh and Williams might do something together. The two great forces of their minds might be directed to one common object and joined in one common fame.

"Partner! Hah!" cried Leigh sharply, "and have all my secrets blown upon in twenty-four hours." Then he added significantly. "The only man whom I would allow into that room for a minute should be deaf and dumb and a fool."

"And not able to read or write," added Williams with answering significance.

"And not able to read or write," said the dwarf, nodding his head to Williams.

The publican stood a foot back from the counter and expanded his chest with pride at the thought of being trusted by the great little man with the secret of the strange winder of two nights ago. Then he added, by way of impressing on Leigh his complete trustworthiness respecting the evening which was not to be spoken of, "By-the-way Mr. Leigh, we saw you wind up last night, sure enough."

"Oh yes, I saw you. I nodded to you."

"Yes, at ten minutes past twelve by my clock, a quarter past twelve by my watch; for I looked, Mr. Leigh. You nodded. I told the gentleman here how wonderfully particular you were about time, and how your clock would go right to a fraction of a second. If I am not mistaken this gentleman was here. Weren't you here, sir?" Williams said, addressing Stamer for the first time, but without moving from where he stood.

"I happened to be here at the time, and I saw the gentleman at the window above," said Stamer in a meek voice.

Then a remarkable thing happened.

The partition between the private bar and the public bar was about six feet high. Just over the dwarf's head a pair of long thin hands appeared on the top of the partition, and closed on it, with the fingers pointing downward. Then very slowly and quite silently a round, shabby, brown hat stole upwards over the partition, followed by a dirty yellow-brown forehead, and last of all a pair of gleaming blue eyes that for a moment looked into the private bar, and then silently the eyes, the forehead and the hat, sank below the rail, and finally the hands were withdrawn from the top of the partition. From the moment of the appearance of the hands on the rail until they left it did not occupy ten seconds.

No one in the private bar saw the apparition.

"Well," said Leigh, who showed no disposition to include Stamer in the conversation, "I can have a breath of air to-night when I am winding up. I am free till then. I think I'll go and look after that mummy. Oh! here's Binns, with the muslin. Thank you, Binns, this will do capitally."

He took the little silver flask out of his pocket, and poured a few drops from it into his hand and sniffed it up, and then made a noisy expiration.

"Very refreshing. Very refreshing, indeed. I know I needn't ask you, Williams. I know you never touch it. You have no idea of how refreshing it is."

The smell of eau-de-cologne filled the air.

Stamer watched the small silver flask with eyes that blazed balefully behind the safe screen of his blue glasses.

"Would you oblige me," he said in a timid voice, holding out his hand as he spoke.

Leigh was in the act of returning the tiny flask to his waistcoat pocket. He arrested it a moment, and then let it fall in out of sight, saying sharply: "You wouldn't like it, sir. Very few people do like it. You must be used to it."

Stamer's suspicions were now fully roused. This was the very drug Leigh had used with Timmons. It produced little or no effect on the dwarf, for as he explained, he was accustomed to it, but on a man who had never inhaled it before the effect would be instant, and long and complete

insensibility. "I should like very much to try. I can stand very strong smelling salts."

"Oh! indeed. Can you? Then you would like to try some strong smelling salts?" said Leigh with a sneer as he scornfully surveyed the shabby man who had got off his stool and was standing within a few feet of him. "Well, I have no more in the flask. That was the last drop, but I have some in this." Out of his other waistcoat pocket he took a small glass bottle with a ground cap and ground stopper. He twisted off the cap and loosened the stopper. "This is very strong, remember."

"All right." If he became insensible here at this time it would do no harm. There was plenty of help at hand, and nothing at stake, not as with Timmons last night in that house over the way.

"Snuff up heartily," said the dwarf, holding out the bottle towards the other with the stopper removed.

Stamer leaned on one of the high stools with both his hands, and put his nose over the bottle. With a yell he threw his arms wildly into the air and fell back on the floor as if he were shot.

Williams sprang up on the counter and cried: "What's this! He isn't dead?" in terror.

The potman flew over the counter into the public bar, and rushed into the private compartment.

The solitary customer in the public bar drew himself up once more and stared at the prostrate man with round blue eyes.

Leigh laughed harshly as he replaced the stopper and screwed on the cap.

"Dead! Not he! He's all right! He said he could stand strong salts. I gave him the strongest ammonia. That's all."

The potman had lifted Stamer from the ground, propped him against the wall and flung half a bottle of water over his head.

Stamer recovered himself instantly. His spectacles were in pieces on the floor. He did not, considering his false beard and whiskers, care for any more of the potman's kindnesses. He stooped, picked up his hat and walked quickly out of the Hanover.

"I like to see a man like that," said Leigh, calmly blowing a dense cloud of cigar-smoke from his mouth and nodding his head in the direction Stamer had taken.

"You nearly killed the man," said Williams, dropping down from the counter inside the bar and staring at Leigh with frightened eyes that looked larger than usual owing to the increased pallor of his face.

"Pooh! Nonsense! That stuff wouldn't kill anyone unless he had a weak heart or smashed his head in his fall. I got it merely to try the effect of it combined with a powerful galvanic battery, on the nasal muscles of my mummy. Now, if that man were dead we'd get him all right again in a jiffy with one sniff of it. I was saying I like a man like him. You see, he was impudent and intruded himself on me when he had no right to do anything of the kind, and he insisted on smelling my strong salts. Well, he had his wish, and he came to grief, and he picked himself up, or rather Binns picked him up, and he never said anything but went away. He knew he was in the wrong, and he knew he got worsted, and he simply walked away. That is the spirit which makes Englishmen so great all the world over. When they are beaten they shake hands and say no more about the affair. That's true British pluck." Leigh blew another dense cloud of smoke in front of him and looked complacently at Williams.

"Well," said the publican in a tone of doubt, "he didn't exactly shake hands, you know. He does look a bit down in the world, seems to me an undertaker's man out of work, but I rather wonder he didn't kick up a row. Many another man would."

"A man of any other nationality would, but not a Britisher. If, however, you fancy the poor chap is out of work and he comes back and grumbles about the thing, give him half-a-sovereign from me."

"Mr. Leigh, I must say that is very handsome of you, sir," said Williams, thawing thoroughly. He was a kind-hearted man, and did think the victim of the trick ought to get some sort of compensation.

Meanwhile, Stamer had reached the open air and was seemingly in no great hurry to go back to the Hanover to claim the provision Leigh had made for his injury. He

did not seem in a hurry to go anywhere, and a person who knew of what had taken place in the private bar, and seeing him move slowly up Welbeck Place with his left shoulder to the wall and his eyes on the window of the workshop, would think he was either behaving very like a kicked cur and sinking away with the desire of attracting as little attention as possible, or that he was meditating the mean revenge of breaking the dwarf's window.

But Stamer was not sneaking away. He was simply taking observations in a comprehensive and leisurely manner. Above all, he was not dreaming of breaking the clockmaker's window. On the contrary he was hugging himself with delight at the notion that he would not have to break Leigh's window. No, there would not be the least necessity for that. As the window was now no doubt it would be necessary to smash one pane at least. But with that muslin blind well soaked in oil stretched across the open, caused by the raising of the lower sash there would be no need whatever of injuring the dwarf's glass.

He passed very slow down Welbeck Place towards the mews under the window which lighted the private bar, and through which he had watched the winding up of the clock last night. His eyes, now wanting the blue spectacles, explored and examined every feature of Forbes's with as close a scrutiny as though he were inspecting it to ascertain its stability.

When he had deliberately taken in all that eyes could see in the gable of Forbes's bakery, he turned his attention to his left, and looked with care unmingled with anxiety at the gable or rather second side of the Hanover. Then he passed slowly on. It might almost be fancied from his tedious steps that he had hurt his back or his legs in his fall, but he did not limp or wriggle or drag his legs.

Beyond the Hanover, that is on this side between the end of the public house and the Welbeck Mews, were two poor two-storey houses, let in tenements to men who found employment about the mews. These houses Stamer observed closely also, and then passed under the archway into the mews. Here he looked back on the gables of the tenement houses. They were, he saw, double-roofed, with a gutter

in the middle, and from the gutter to the mews descended a water-pipe into the ground,

When there was nothing more to be noted in the outside of the gables, Stamer pulled his hat over his eyes and struck out briskly across the mews, which he quitted by the southern outlet.

As he finished his inspection and left the mews he thought:

"So that was the stuff he gave Timmons, was it? I suppose it had more effect on him or he got more of it. It didn't take my senses away for more than a flash of lightning, but more of it might knock me silly for a while. Besides, Timmons is not as strong a man as I. It is a wonder it did not kill him. I felt as if the roof of my skull was blown off. I felt inclined to draw and let him have an ounce. But then, although he may be playing into the hands of the police, he isn't a policeman. He couldn't have done the drill, although his boots are as big as the regulation boots. Then, even if I did draw on him I couldn't have got away. There were too many people about.

"So he'll wind up his clock to-night between twelve and half-past, will he? It will take him the longest half-hour he ever spent in all his life! There's plenty of time to get the tools ready, and for a little practice too."

Stamer had no personal resentment against Leigh because of the trick put upon him. A convict never has the sense of the sacred inviolateness of his person that belongs to men of even the most depraved character who have never "done time." He had arrived at his deadly intent not from feelings of revenge but from motives of prudence. Leigh possessed dangerous information, and Leigh was guilty of treason and was trying to compass betrayal; therefore he must be put away, and put away at once.

Meanwhile the man who drew himself up by his hands, and looked over the partition between the public and private bar, had left the Hanover. He was a very tall man with grizzled, mutton-chop whiskers and an exceedingly long, rusty neck. He wore a round-topped brown hat, and tweed clothes, a washed-out blue neckerchief, the knot of which hung low on his chest. He had no linen collar, and as he walked carried his hands thrust deep into his trowsers' pockets.

He, too, had come to Chetwynd Street, to the Hanover, to gather any facts he might meet about this strange clock-maker and his strange ways. He had gone into the public bar for he did not wish to encounter face to face the man about whom he was inquisitive. He had sent a boy for Stamer's wife and left her in charge of his marine store in Tunbridge Street, saying he was unexpectedly obliged to go to the Surrey Dock. He told her of the visit Stamer had paid him that morning, and said he thought her husband was getting a bit crazy. Then he left her, having given her instructions about the place and promising to be back in a couple of hours.

Timmons was more than three hours gone, and when he re-entered Tunbridge Street Mrs. Stamer came in great excitement to meet him, saying she had no notion he would be so long and that if Tom came back during her absence he would be furious, as she had left no word where she was to be found. To this Timmons replied shortly that he didn't suppose Stamer would have come back, and parted from her almost rudely, which showed he was in a mind far from ordinary, for he was always jocular and polite after his fashion to the woman.

When he was alone in his own place he began walking up and down in a state of great perturbation.

"I don't know what to make of it—I don't know what to make of it," he thought. "Stamer is no fool, and I know he would not lie to me. He says he saw Leigh wind up the clock at the time Leigh was standing with me under the church tower. The landlord of that public-house says he saw him, and Leigh himself says he nodded to the landlord at a quarter past twelve! I'm not mad, and I wasn't drunk. What can it mean? I can make nothing of it.

"There may be something in what Stamer says after all. This miserable, hump-backed creature may be only laying a trap for us. If I thought I was to be caught after my years of care and caution by a mannikin like that, I'd slit his wizzard for him. I did not like his way last night, and the more I think of it the less I like it. I think I had better be off this job. I don't like it, but I don't care to fail, particularly after telling Stamer all about it.

"What business had that fool Stamer to walk straight

into the lion's mouth? What did he want in Chetwynd Street? No doubt he went there on the same errand as I, to try to find out something more about last night. Well, a nice thing he did find out. What infernal stuff did the dwarf give Stamer to smell? It was a mercy it did not kill the man. If it had killed Stamer, and there had been an inquest, it would have made a nice mess. No one could tell what might have come out about Stamer, about the whole lot, about myself!

"It is plain no one ought to have further dealings with that little man. Anyone who could give stuff like that to a man to smell in broad daylight, and in the presence of witnesses, would not stick at a trifle in the dark and when no one was by. Yes, I must cut the dwarf. Fortunately, there is nothing in Leigh's possession he can use against me. I took good care of that.

"How will Stamer take the affair? Will he cherish anger? Will he want revenge?

"Well, if he will let him."

These were not the words in which Timmons thought, but they represent the substance of his cogitations.

Meanwhile, Oscar Leigh had left Chetwynd Street, and gone back to the clock-room to fix the new blind Binns, the potman, had bought for him. He had not intended returning that day, but he had nothing special to do, and the blind was a new idea and new ideas interested him.

He let himself in by the private door, and went straight to the clock-room. He had a bottle of sweet oil, and the roll of muslin. He oiled the muslin, and having stretched and nailed it in position, raised the lower sash of the window about two feet from the sill. The muslin was double, and the two sheets were kept half an inch apart by two rods, so that any dust getting through the outer fold might be caught by the inner one. Having settled this screen to his satisfaction he left the room and descended once more.

"My clock," he thought, "will be enough for fame. I will not meddle with this Miracle Gold. I am committed to nothing, and anything Timmons may say will be only slander, even if he did dare to speak."

He reached the street, and wandered on aimlessly.

"My clock when it is finished will be the most perfect piece of mechanism ever designed and executed by one man. It will be classed among the wonders of the world, and be spoken of with admiration as long as civilization lasts.

"But I must take care it does not get the upper hand of me. Already the multiplicity of the movements confuse my head at times when I am not near it. I must be careful of my head, or my great work will suffer. Sometimes I see those figures of time all modelled and fashioned and in their proper dispositions executing their assigned evolutions. At times I am in doubt about them. They grow faint, and cobwebby, and misty, as though they were huddled together in some dim room, to which one ray of light was suddenly admitted. I must be careful of my head.

"Long ago, and also until not very long ago, when I added a new effect or movement it fell into its proper place and troubled me no more. Now, when I am away from my clock, when I cannot see and touch it, I often forget a movement, or give it a wrong direction, draw from it a false result.

"I am too much a man of one idea. I have imagination enough for a score of hands and ten stout bodies, and I have only a pair of hands and THIS!"

He paused and looked down at his protuberant chest and twisted trunk, and shrunken, bent legs, and enormous feet.

"I am a bad specimen of the work of Nature's journeyman, to put it as some one does, and I am abominably made—all except the head!"

He threw up his head and glanced around with scornful challenge in his eye.

"Hey!" cried a man's voice in alarm.

He looked up.

The chest of a horse was within a hand's breadth of his shoulder. The horse's head was flung aloft. The horse snorting and quivering, and bearing back upon his haunches.

Leigh sprang aside and looked around. He was in the middle of Piccadilly at Hyde Park Corner. He had almost been ridden over by a group of equestrians.

The gentleman whose horse had nearly touched him, took off his hat and apologised.

"You stopped suddenly right under the horse's head," said the gentleman. "I am extremely sorry."

Leigh raised his stick to strike the head of the horse.

The rider pulled his horse sharply away and muttered something under his breath.

"Oh, Sir Julius," cried a voice in terror, "it's Mr. Leigh!"

The dwarf's stick fell from his hand. "God's mercy in Heaven!" he cried in a whisper, as he took off his hat slowly, "Miss Ashton!"

Then, bareheaded and without his stick, he went up to the side of her horse, and said in a hoarse whisper, "I will have nothing to do with that Miracle Gold!"

A groom who had dismounted handed him his stick, and putting on his hat, he hastened away through the crowd which had begun to gather, leaving Dora in a state of mingled alarm and pity.

"Is he mad?" said Sir Julius Whinfield as the dwarf disappeared and the equestrians moved on.

"I'm sure I don't know. I think not. For a moment he terrified me, and now he breaks my heart!"

"Breaks your heart?"

"Oh, he ought not to be human! There surely can be no woe like his!"

CHAPTER XXX.

DORA ASHTON ALONE.

DORA ASHTON was greatly shocked and distressed by the peril of Oscar Leigh and his subsequent behaviour.

"I am sure, Miss Ashton, I hope you will not imagine for a moment either that I was riding carelessly or that I recognised Mr. Leigh until you spoke. I saw him plainly enough as he was crossing the road. He was not minding in the least where he was going. He would have got across us in good time if he had only kept on; but he pulled up suddenly right under my horse's nose. I am sure I was

more frightened than he. By Jove! how he glared at me. I think he would have killed me there and then if he could. He was going to strike my horse with that dreadful bludgeon of his. I am sure I was much more frightened than he was," said Sir Julius, in a penitential tone of voice, as the two rode on side by side.

The other members of the party, including Mr. Ashton, had fallen behind and were also discussing the incident among themselves.

"You were quite blameless," said the girl, who was still pale and trembling. "I don't suppose the poor man was much afraid. Of what should he be afraid?"

"Well," said the baronet, stroking the arching neck of his bay, "he was within an ace of being ridden over, you know."

"And suppose he had been knocked down and ridden over, what has he to fear, poor man?" she said. Her eyes were fixed and she was speaking as if unconscious she uttered her words. The group had turned out of the noise of Piccadilly and were riding close together.

"He might have been hurt, I mean seriously hurt. Particularly he."

"Hurt! How could he be hurt? You might be hurt or I might be hurt, but how could he be hurt. Particularly he! You fancy because he is maimed and misshapen he is more likely to be hurt than a sound man?"

"Assuredly."

"I cannot see that. When people say a man was hurt, they do not mean merely or mostly that he endured pain. They mean that he was injured or disabled in some way. How can you injure or disable him? He is as much injured and disabled as a man can be and live."

"That is very true; but he might have been killed. Miss Ashton, you do not mean to say you think it would be better he had been killed?" cried Sir Julius in a tone of one shocked and surprised.

"I do not know. Surely death and Heaven must be conditions of greater ease and happiness for him than for ordinary mortals."

"I am entirely of your opinion there. But from what I saw and heard of this man yesterday and to-day, I am dis-

posed to think he has self-esteem enough to sustain him in any difficulty and carry him through any embarrassment."

"How are we to know how much of this self-esteem is assumed?"

"It does not matter whether it is assumed or not, so long as it is sustaining."

"What! Does it not matter at what expense it is hired for use? You amaze me, Sir Julius. You are generally sympathetic and sound, I think you have not been taking your lessons regularly under Lady Forcar. She would be quicker sighted in a matter of this kind." The girl shook off her air of abstraction and smiled at the young man.

"No, Miss Ashton, I am not neglecting the lectures of Lady Forcar, but of late they have not been much concerned with man. I deeply deplore it, but she has taken to pigs. Anyway she would talk of nothing but pigs yesterday, at your mother's. And even the improvement of my mind does not come within her consideration under the head of pigs, although I begged of her to be gracious and let it."

"That is very sad indeed. You must feel sorely slighted. And what has she to say about pigs?"

"Oh, I really couldn't think of half the distractingly flattering things she has to say about them. She made me miserably jealous I assure you. She says she is going to write an article for one of the heavy, of the very heaviest magazines, and she is going to call her article 'Dead Pigs and the Pigs that eat them,' and such harmless people as you and I are to be considered among the latter class in the title. Isn't that fearful? She says from this forth, her mission is pigs."

"I shall certainly read this wonderful article when it appears," said the girl with a laugh. "Can you tell me anything more about this article?"

"No; except that it was Mr. Leigh started the subject between her and me."

"Mr. Leigh?" said Dora gravely.

"Yes. When she saw him eat all your bread and butter, she said he was a man who, in the hands of a clever wife, might act the part of a Napoleon the Great in social matters."

The grave look on Dora's face changed to one of sad-

ness. At first, when Sir Julius mentioned the dwarf's name, she thought some unkind reference was about to be made to his unhappy physical deformities. Now her anxiety was relieved on that score only to have her feelings aroused anew over the spectacle of his spiritual desolation. He marry! How could he marry? And yet he had told them he had found the model for his Pallas-Athena. She was not so simple as to think the mere intellectual being was represented to him by the model for his Pallas-Athena. Suppose he used the name of Pallas-Athena only out of shyness for what struck him as mere loveliness in woman, mere good looks and kindness of nature? What a heart-breaking thought! What an awful torture it must be to be hungry for love and beauty in such a form!

Sir Julius Whinfield left her at the house in Curzon Street, and she went up to her own room to change her dress. She had nothing arranged for between that and dinner. Her father had gone away on foot from the house, and her mother had taken the carriage before luncheon to pay a visit to some people in whom Dora was not interested. The girl had all the afternoon to herself, and she had plenty of thought to occupy it. She threw herself in a large easy chair by the open window. Her room was at the back of the house, and looked out on a space of roofs and walls and tiny gardens. There was nothing in view to distract the eye. There was much within to exercise the spirit.

"It would be madness," was the result of deep and long thought, "to go any further. I like him well enough and admire him greatly, and I daresay—no, let me be quite candid—I *know* he likes me. I daresay we are better disposed towards each other than one tenth of the people who marry, but that is not enough.

"We did not fall in love with one another at first sight. It was no boy and girl attachment. We were attracted towards one another by the intellectual sides of our characters. I thought I was wiser than other girls in not allowing my fancy to direct my fate. I thought he and I together might achieve great things. I am now afraid it is as great, even a greater, mistake to marry for intellect than to marry for money or position.

"I have made up my mind now. Nothing shall change

me. My decision is as much for his good as my own. Last night was not the climax of what would be. It was only the first of a long line of difficulties or quarrels that would increase as time went on.

"We have been enduring one another out of admiration for one another, not loving one another for our own and love's own sake.

"It will cost me many a pang, but it must be done. I shall make no sign. I shall make no announcement. No one has been formally told we are engaged, and no one has any business to know. If people have guessed it, let them now guess the engagement has been broken off. I am not bound to enlighten them."

Then she rose and found materials for a letter, and wrote :

"DEAR MR. HANBURY,

"I have been thinking a great deal of the talk we had last night after dinner, and I have come to the conclusion that it was all for the best. We should never be able to agree. I think the least said now the better. Our engagement has not been announced to anyone. Nothing need be said about its being broken off. I hope this arrangement will be carried out with as little pain to either as possible. I shall not send you back your letters. I am sure getting back letters is always painful, and ought to be avoided. I shall burn yours, and I ask you to do the same with any notes you may have of mine. Neither will I return the few things that cannot be burned. None of them is, I think, of any intrinsic value to you beyond the value it had between you and me. I shall keep them for a week and then destroy them.

"Believe me, Mr. Hanbury, I take this step with a view to our mutual good, and in no haste or pique. I shall always think of you with the greatest interest and respect. I should like, if you think well of it, that we may remain friends in appearance as I hope we may always be in spirit.

"I ask you for only one favour. Pray do not make any attempt whatever to treat this decision as anything but final and irrevocable.

"Yours very sincerely,

"DORA ASHTON."

She determined not to post this letter until late that night. To-morrow she was dining out. She should leave home early and not come back until she had to go straight to her room to dress. After dinner, they were going to the theatre, so she should avoid all chance of meeting him if he disregarded her request and called.

So far the difficult parts of the affair had been done, and done too with much less pain than she could have imagined. She had taken the two great steps without faltering. She had made up her mind to end the engagement between her and John Hanbury, and she had written to him saying the engagement was at an end. If ill-matched people who found themselves engaged to one another only acted with her decision and promptness what an infinity of misery would be avoided. She was almost surprised it had required so little effort for her to make up her mind and to put her decision on paper. She had often heard of the miseries such a step entailed, and here she was now sitting alone in her own room after doing the very thing and feeling little the worse of it. She was but twenty-one, and she had broken with the only man she had ever seriously thought of as a lover, and it had not caused her anything like the pang she had suffered last night when he reproached her so bitterly and told her he could expect nothing but betrayal at her hands.

And now that the important part of the affair had been disposed of in a business-like way, what had she to do?

Nothing.

She could do nothing else whatever. It wanted some hours of dinner time, and no one ever called upon them on Fridays except—him, and he would not call to-day. She should have the whole of the afternoon to herself. That was fortunate, for although she did not feel greatly depressed or cast down, she was not inclined towards company of any kind. It had been arranged early yesterday that she should ride with her father in the Park to-day, and she had not cared to plead any excuse, for she did not want to attract attention to herself, and besides, she did not feel very much in need of any excuse since she knew he would not be there. He knew they were to ride there. In fact he had promised to meet her there, but after last night he

would not of course go, for he would not like the first meeting after last night to occur in so public a place and so soon after that scene.

Yes, everything was in perfectly regular order now and she had the afternoon to herself without any fear of interruption. So she could now sit down and rest, and—think.

Then she remained quite still for a long time in her easy chair, quite still, with her hand before her face and her eyes closed. The difficulties had been faced and overcome in a wise and philosophical way, and nothing remained to be done but to do nothing, and as she sat and thought this doing of nothing became harder than all that had gone before. She had told herself she was a person of convictions and principles when she was resolving on action and acting on resolve. She had no further need of her convictions and principles. She laid them aside with the writing materials out of which she had called forth that letter to Jack—to Mr. Hanbury. She did not realize until this moment, she had not had time to realize it, that she was a woman, a young girl who had given her heart to a young man, and that now he and she had parted to meet no more on the old terms.

It was easy to shut up the ceremonious gates of the temple and say worship was at an end in that place for ever. But how fared it in the penetralia of her heart? How did she face the inner chambers of her soul where the statue of her hero stood enshrined for worship? It cost but little effort to say that the god was deposed, but could she all at once effectually forbid the priestess to worship?

Ah, this doing of nothing when all had been done, was ten thousand times harder than action!

All the faculties of her reason were in favour of her decision, but what has the reason to do with the glance of an eye, or the touch of a hand, of the confiding commune of a soul in sympathy with one's own?

She understood him better than any other woman ever should. It was her anxiety that he should stand high in his own regard that made her jealous of his little weaknesses, and they were little, and only weaknesses after all, and only weaknesses in a giant, not the weaknesses of a man of

common clay. If she had loved more what he was to her than what she dreamed he might be to himself and all the world, she would have taken no trouble in these matters that angered him to fury.

And why should he not be angered with her for her poor, feeble woman's interference with his lion nature? Why should he not turn upon her and revile her for coming across his path? Who was she that she must irritate him that was all the world to her, and deferred to by all men who came his way? Why should she thwart or impede him?

He was not perfect, no doubt, but who had set her the task of perfecting him?

Her haughty love.

Yes, the very intensity of her love had ended in the estrangement of the lover. She found noble qualities in the man, and she had tried to make him divine. Not because he was *her* lover, but because she *loved him*. She had given him her heart and soul, and now she had sacrificed her love itself upon the altar of her devotion.

That was the heroic aspect of the affair, and as in all other sorrows that take large shape, the heroic aspect elevated above pain and forbade the canker of tears.

But this girl saw other aspects too.

She should miss him—oh, so bitterly! She should miss him the whole of her life forth from that hour! She should miss him in the immediate future. She had missed him that day in the Park. She should miss him to-morrow. He always came on Saturdays. He used to say he always came to Curzon Street on Saturday afternoon, like any other good young man, to see his sweetheart when the shop was shut. She should miss him on Sunday, too, for he always came on Sunday, saying, the better the day the better the deed. On Mondays he made it a point to stay away, but contrived to meet her somewhere, in the Park, or at a friend's place, or in Regent Street, and now he would stay away altogether, not making a point of it, but because she had told him to make an observance of always staying away.

She should miss his voice, his marvellous voice, which could be so clarion toned and commanding among men, and was so soft and tunable for her ear. When he spoke

to her it always seemed that the instrumental music designed to accompany his words had fared off into silence for shame of its inadequacy. How poor and thin and harsh all voices would sound now. They would merely make idle sounds to the idle air. Of old, of that old which began its backward way only yesterday, all voices had seemed the prelude of his. They sounded merely as notes of preparation and awakening. They were only the overture, full of hints and promises.

She should miss his eyes. She should miss the clear vivid leap of flame into his eyes when he glanced at her with enthusiasm, or joy, or laughter. She should miss the gleam of that strange light which, once having caught his eye in moments of enthusiasm, appeared to bathe his face while he looked and spoke. She should miss the sound of his footstep, that fleet herald of his impatient love!

Oh, it was hard—hard—hard to be doomed to miss so much!

And all this was only what she should miss in the immediate future.

In the measure of her after life would be nothing but idle air. In her dreams of the future she had pictured him going forth from her in the morning radiant and confident, to mingle in some worthy strife, and coming back in the evening suffused with glory, to draw breaths of peaceful ease in her society, in her home, her new home, their joint home. She had thought of the reverse of this picture. She had thought of him returning weary and unsuccessful, coming home to her for rest now, and soothing service of love and inspiring words of hope.

She had visions of later life and visions of their gradual decay, and going down the hill of life hand in hand together. She had dreamed they should never, never, never be parted.

And now they were parted for ever and ever and ever, and she should miss him to-day and to-morrow and all the days of the year now half spent, and of all the after years of her life.

She should miss him in death. She should not lie by his side in the grave. She should not be with him in the Life to Come.

All the glory of the world was only a vapour, a mist. The sunlight was a purposeless weariness. The smell of the flowers in the window-sill was thin and foretold decay. What was the use of a house and servants and food. Lethe was a river of Hell. Why? Why not a river of Paradise?

She should not be with him even in the grave—even in the grave where he could have no fear of her betraying him!

She would now take any share of humbleness in life if she might count on touching his hand and being for ever near him in the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WINDING UP THE CLOCK.

It was eleven o'clock that night when Tom Stamer, dressed in the seedy black clothes and wearing the false beard and whiskers he had on in the morning, started from the Borough once more for the West. He had not replaced the spectacles broken in his fall at the Hanover in Chetwynd Street. He carried a very substantial-looking walking-stick of great thickness and weight. It was not a loaded stick, but it would manifestly be a terrible weapon at close quarters, for, instead of consisting of metal only in one part of one end, it was composed of metal throughout. The seeming stick was not wood or leaded wood, but iron. It was not solid, but hollow like a gas pipe, and at the end intended to touch the ground, the mouth of the tube was protected by a brass ferrule to which a small tampion was affixed. The handle was massive and crooked, and large enough to give ample hold to the largest hand of man. About a couple of inches from the crook there was a joining where the stick could be unscrewed.

Stamer accounted to the eyes of observers for carrying so massive a stick by affecting a lameness of the right leg. When he entered a dense crowd or came upon a point at which the people were hurrying, he raised the stick up

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from the ground and laid aside his limp. But where people where few and close observation of him possible, his lameness grew very marked, and not only did his stick seem indispensable, but he put it down on the pavement as gingerly as though the least jar caused him pain. Sympathetic people who saw him fancied he had but just come out of hospital, and were inclined to be indignant that he had not been supplied with more effectual support, such as crutches.

One old gentleman asked him if he ought not to have a second stick; Stamer snivelled and said he knew he ought, but declared with a sigh he had no money to buy another one. The old gentleman gave Stamer a shilling. Stamer touched his hat, thanked the old gentleman for his kindness and his gift, and requested Heaven to bless him. The old gentleman wore a heavy gold chain and, no doubt, a watch. But Stamer had important business on hand, and there were a great number of people about, and he did not want to run, for running would make his arm unsteady, so he asked Heaven to bless the old gentleman and forebore to rob him.

But the thought of that missed opportunity rankled in him. The feeling that he had been obliged to neglect business and accept charity fretted and vexed him. The thought of the mean squalid shilling made him sick, and as soon as he came to a quiet place he threw it with a curse into the middle of the road. He had shillings of his own, and didn't want charity of any man. If he had stolen the shilling that would have been a different affair. Then it would have come to him in a straightforward business-like way, and would, doubtless, be the best he could have done under the circumstances. But now it seemed the result of a fraud committed upon him, to which he had been forced to consent. It was the ransom he had under duress accepted for a gold watch and chain, and was, therefore, loathsome and detestable in his sight. Its presence could not be endured. It was abominable. Foh! He was well rid of it.

He did not approach Welbeck Place by Chetwynd Street. He did not intend repeating his visit to Mr. Williams's house. He had got there all he wanted and a

little more. He kept along by the river and then retraced the way he had come that afternoon after leaving the Hanover. On his previous visit to-day to this locality he had been silent and watchful as a cat, and he had a cat's strong sense of locality. He never forgot a place he was once in; and, piercing northward from the river through a network of mean streets he had never seen until to-day, he hit upon the southward entrance to Welbeck Mews with as much ease and certainty as though he had lived there for twenty years.

The mews were lonely after nightfall, and the road through them little used. When Stamer found himself in the yard, the place was absolutely deserted. They were a cabman's mews and no one would, in all likelihood, have business there for a couple of hours. The night was now as dark as night ever is at that time of the year, and the place was still. It wanted about twenty minutes of twelve yet.

When Stamer came to the gable of the house next but one to the Hanover, and the wall of which formed one half of the northern boundary of the yard, he paused and listened. He could hear no sound of life or movement near him beyond the snort or cough of a horse now and then.

The ostler who waited on the cabmen lived in the house at the gable of which he stood, and at this hour he had to be aroused in case of any man returning because of accident, or a horse knocked up by some long and unexpected drive. As a rule the ostler slept undisturbed from eleven at night till half-past four or five in the morning.

After a pause of two or three minutes, Stamer stooped, slipped off his boots, slung them round his neck, and having hitched the crook of his heavy stick to a belt he wore under his waistcoat, he laid hold of the waterpipe that descended from the gutter of the double roof to the yard, and began ascending the gable of the house with surprising agility and speed.

In less than two minutes from the time he first seized the waterpipe he disappeared in the gutter above. He crawled in a few yards from the edge and then reclined

against the sloping slates of the roof to rest. The ascent had taken only a couple of minutes, but the exertion had been very great, and he was tired and out of breath.

Then he unscrewed the ferrule and withdrew the tam-pion and unscrewed the handle of his stick, and was busy in the darkness for a while with the weapon he carried. Overhead the stars looked pale and faint and wasting in the pale yellow cloud that hangs by night over London in summer, the glare of millions of lights on the vapour rising up from the great city.

He particularly wished to have a steady hand and arm that night, in a few minutes, so he made up his mind to rest until five minutes to twelve. Then he should get into position. He should creep down the gutter until he came to the wall of the Hanover, the gable wall of the Hanover standing up over the roofs of the houses on which he now was lying. He should then be almost opposite the window at which he last night saw the dwarf wind up his clock. He should be a little out of the direct line, but not much. The width of Welbeck Place was no more from house to house than fifty feet. The distance from the wall of the house he should be on then, and the wall of Forbes's bakery could not be more than sixty feet. The weapon he carried was perfectly trustworthy at a hundred, a hundred-and fifty yards, or more. He had been practising that afternoon and evening at an old hat at forty yards, and he had never missed it once. Forty yards was just double the distance he should be from that window if he were on a parapet instead of being at the coping tile, lying on the inside slope of the roof. Allow another ten feet for that. This would bring the distance up to seventy feet at the very outside, and he had never missed once at a hundred and twenty feet. He had given himself now and then a good deal of practice with the gun, for he enjoyed peculiar facilities; because the factory wall by which the lane at the back of his place ran, prevented anyone seeing what he was doing, and the noise of the factory drowned the whurr of the gun and the whizz of the bullet.

There was to be a screen, or curtain, or blind up to-night, but that was all the better, for it made no difference to the aim or bullet, and it would prevent anything being

noticed for a while, perhaps until morning no one would know.

The work would go on at the window until half-past twelve. It would be as well not to *do it* until very near half-past; for then there would be the less time for anyone in the Hanover to spy out anything wrong. At half-past would come the noise and confusion of closing time. There would then be plenty of people about, and it would be quite easy to get away.

It was a good job there were no windows in the Hanover gable, though no one was likely to be upstairs in the public-house until after closing time. The landlord was not a married man. It was a good job there was no moon.

It would be a good job when this was done.

It was a good job he thought of waiting until just half-past twelve, for then everything would be more favourable below, and his hand and arm would have more time to steady.

It was a good job that in this country there were some things stronger than even smelling-salts!

At half-past eleven that night the private bar of the Hanover held about half-a-dozen customers. The weather was too warm for anything like a full house. Three or four of the men present were old frequenters, but it lacked the elevating presence of Oscar Leigh, who always gave the assembly a distinctly intellectual air, and it was not cheered and consoled by the radiation of wealth from Mr. Jacobs, the rich greengrocer of Sloane Street.

The three or four frequenters present were in no way distinguished beyond their loyalty to the house. They came there regularly night after night, drank, in grave silence, a regular quantity of beer and spirits, and went away at closing time with the conviction that they had been spending their time profitably attending to the improvement of their minds. They had no views on any subjects ever discussed. They had, with reference to the Hanover, only one opinion, and it was that the finishing touches of a liberal education could nowhere else in London be so freely obtained without derogation and on the self-respecting principle of every man paying his way and being theoretically as good as any other. If they could they would put

a stop to summer in these islands, for summer had a thinning and depreciating effect on the company of the private bar.

A few minutes later, however, the spirits of those present rose, for first Mr. Jacobs came in, smiling and bland, and then Mr. Oscar Leigh, rubbing his forehead and complaining of the heat.

Mr. Jacobs greeted the landlord and the dwarf affably, as became a man of substance, and then, knowing no one else by name, greeted the remainder of the company generally, as became a man of politeness and consideration.

"I'll have three-pennyworth of your excellent rum hot," said Mr. Jacobs to the landlord, in a way which implied that, had not the opinion of an eminent physician been against it, he would have ordered ten times the quantity and drank it with pleasure. Then he sat down on a seat that ran along the wall, took out of his pocket a cigar case, opened it carefully, and, having selected a cigar, examined the weed as though it was not uncommon to discover protruding through the side of these particular cigars a diamond of priceless value or a deadly drug. Then he pierced the end of his cigar with a silver piercer which he took out of a trousers' pocket, pulled down his waistcoat, and began to smoke, wearing his hat just a trifle on one side to show that he was unbent.

Just as he had settled himself comfortably, the door of the public department opened, and a tall, thin man, with enormous ears, wearing long mutton-chop whiskers, a brown round hat, and dark chocolate-coloured clothes, entered and was served by the potman.

"I have only a minute or two. I must be off to wind up," said Leigh. "Ten minutes to twelve by your clock, Mr. Williams, that means a quarter to right time. I'll have three of rum hot, if you please."

"That's quite right, Mr. Leigh," said the landlord, proceeding to brew the punch and referring to his clock. "We always keep our clock a few minutes fast to avoid bother at closing time. The same as always, Mr. Jacobs, I see, and I *smell*."

"I beg your pardon?" said the greengrocer, as though he hadn't the least notion of what the landlord alluded to.



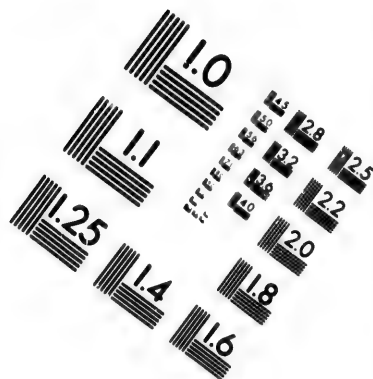
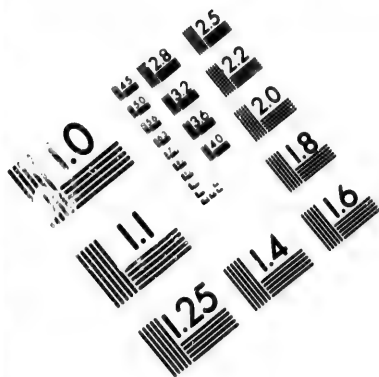
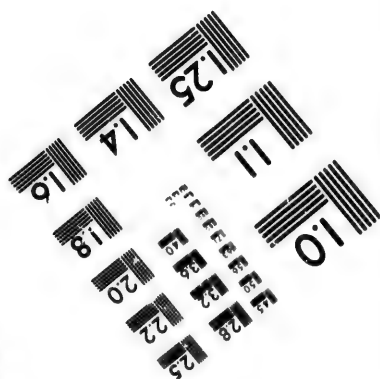
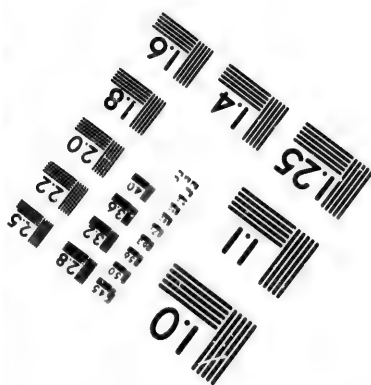
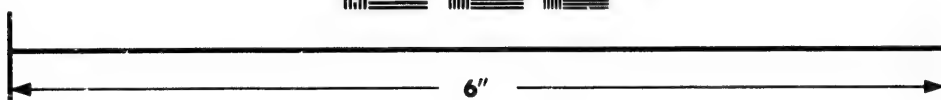
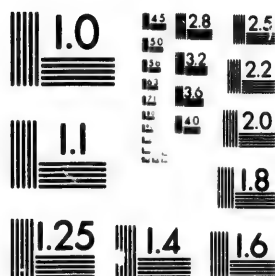


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"A good cigar, sir. That is an excellent cigar you are smoking."

It was clear that up to that moment Mr. Jacobs had not given a thought to the quality of his cigar, for he took it from his lips, looked at it as though he was now pretty certain this particular one did not exude either priceless diamonds or deadly drugs, and said with great modesty and satisfaction, "Yes, it's not bad. I get a case now and then from my friend Isaacs of Bond Street. They cost me, let me see, about sixpence a piece."

There was a faint murmur of approval at this statement. It was most elevating to know that you were acquainted with a man who smoked cigars he bought in Bond Street, and that he did not buy them by the dozen or the box even, but by the case! If a man bought cigars by the case from a friend in Bond Street at the rate of sixpence each, what would be the retail price of them across the counter? It was impossible to say exactly and dangerous to guess, but it was certain you could not buy one for less than a shilling or eighteen-pence, that is, if a man like Mr. Jacobs' friend Mr. Isaacs would demean himself by selling a single one at any price to a chance comer.

"Still working at your wonderful clock, Mr. Leigh?" said the greengrocer from Sloane Street, with the intention of sharing his conversation fairly between the landlord and the dwarf, the only men present who were sitting above the salt.

"Well, sir, literally speaking, I cannot be said to be working at it now. But I am daily engaged upon it, and before a quarter of an hour I shall be busy winding it up."

"Have you to wind it every day?"

"Yes. St. Paul's clock takes three quarters of an hour's winding every day with something like a winch handle. My clock takes half an hour every night. It must be wound between twelve and one, and I have made it a rule to wind it in the first half hour. My one does not want nearly so much power as St. Paul's. It is wound by a lever and not a winch handle. By-and-by, when it is finished and placed in a proper position in a proper tower, and I can increase the power, once a week will be sufficient."

"It is, I have heard, the most wonderful clock in London?"

"In London! In London! In the world, sir. It is the most wonderful clock ever conceived by man."

"And now suppose you forgot to wind it up, what would happen?"

"There is no fear of that."

"It must be a great care on your mind."

"Immense. I have put up a curtain to-day, so that I may be able to keep the window open and get a breath of air this hot weather."

"Are you not afraid of fire up there and so near a bake-house?"

"I never thought of fire. There is little or no danger of fire. Mr. Forbes is quite solvent."

"But suppose anything were to happen, it is so high up, it could not be got down?"

"Got down! Got down! Why, my dear sir, it is twelve feet by nine, and parts of it are so delicate that a rude shake would ruin them. Got down! Why it is shafted to the wall. All my power comes through the wall, from the chimney. When it is shifted no one will be able to stir bolt or nut but me. I must do it, sir. No other man living knows anything about it. No other man could understand it. Fancy anyone but myself touching it! Why he might do more harm in an hour than I could put right in a year, aye, in three years. Well, my time is up. Good night, gentlemen."

He scrambled off his high stool and was quickly out of the bar. It was now five minutes to twelve o'clock right time.

He crossed Welbeck Street and opening the private door of Forbes's in Chetwynd Street went in, closing the door after him.

As he came out John Timmons emerged from the public bar of the Hanover, and turned into Welbeck Place. He went on until he came opposite the window of the clock-room. Here he stood still, thrust his hands deep down in his trousers' pockets, and leaning his back against the wall, prepared to watch with his own eyes the winding of the clock.

In less than five minutes the window of the top room, which had been dark, gradually grew illumined until the light came full through the transparent oiled muslin curtain. Timmons could see for all practical purposes as plainly as through glass.

"There Leigh is, anyway," thought Timmons, "working away at his lever. Can it be he was doing the same thing at this hour last night? Nonsense. He was walking away from this place with me at this hour last night as sure as I am here now. But what did he say himself to-day? I shouldn't mind Stamer, for he is a fool. But the landlord and Stamer say the same thing, and Leigh himself said it too this day. I must be going mad.

"There, he is turning round now and nodding to the men in the bar. They said he did the same last night, and, as I live, there's the clock we were under striking the quarter past again! I must be going mad. I begin to think last night must have been all a dream with me. I don't think he's all right. I don't believe in witchcraft, but I do believe in devilry, and there's something wrong here. I'll watch this out anyway. I must bring him to book over it. I'll tell him straight what I know—that is if I know anything and am not going mad——"

Whurr—whizz!

"Why what's that over head?"

Timmons looked up, but saw nothing.

"It's some young fellows larking."

He glanced back at the window.

"What a funny way he's nodding his head now. And there's a hole in the curtain and there seems to be a noise in the room. There goes the gas out. I suppose the clock is wound up now. Well it's more than I can understand and a great deal more than I like, and I'll have it out of him. It would be too bad if that fool Stamer were right after all, and—but the whole thing is nonsense.

"Strange I didn't hear the clock strike the hour and yet Leigh's light is out. I suppose his half-hour winding was only another piece of his bragging.

"Is the light quite out? Looks now as if it wasn't. He must have put it out by mistake or accident, for surely it hasn't struck half-past twelve yet.

"Ah, what's that? He is lighting a match or something. No, my eyes deceive me. There is no light. Everything here seems to deceive me. I'll go home.

"Ah, there's the half-hour at last!"

And John Timmons walked out of Welbeck Place, and took his way eastward.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MORNING AFTER.

MR. JOHN TIMMONS was not a hard-working man in the sense of one devoted ardently to physical labour. His domain was thought. He was a merchant, a negotiator, not an artisan. He kept his hands in his pockets mostly, in order that his brain might not be distracted by having to look after them. He had a theory that it is wasteful to burn the candle at both ends. If you employ your brain and your hands it will very soon be all over with you. Still, he held that the appearance of indulgence or luxury was most unbecoming in any place of business, and particularly in a marine store, where transactions were concerned with so stern and stubborn things as junk and old metal. He dealt in junk, but out of regard for the feelings of gentlemen who might have had bitter and long acquaintance with it while adorning another sphere, Timmons kept the junk away from sight in the cellar, to which mere callers were never admitted. Timmons had an opinion that the mere look of junk had a tendency to damp the professional ardour of men who had ever spent the days of their captivity in converting it into oakum.

On the ground floor of Timmons's premises there was no such thing as a chair. He looked on a chair in a marine store as a token of dangerous softening of manners. If a man allowed himself a chair in his place of business why not also a smoking-cap and slippers?

But Timmons had a high office stool, which was a thing differing altogether from a chair. It was of Spartan simplicity and uncomfortableness, and besides, it gave the

solvent air of a counting house to the place. It had also another advantage, it enabled you to sit down without placing your eyes lower than the level of a man of your own height standing.

On Saturday morning about nine o'clock Timmons was reposing on the high stool at his doorway, if any part of this establishment may be called a doorway, where one side was all door and there was no other means of exit. He had bought a morning paper on his way to business, and he now sat with the advertising sheet of the paper spread out before him on his knees. Sometimes articles in which he dealt were offered for sale in that sheet, and once in a way he bought a paper to have a look at this sheet, and afterwards, if he had time, scan the news. He made it a point never to look at the reports of the police courts or criminal trials. Every man has his own feelings, and Timmons was not an exception. If an inquiry or trial in which he took interest was going on in London he was certain to know more of it than the newspapers told. He avoided the accounts of trials that did not interest him. They had as damping effect on him as the sight of junk had on some of his customers.

Beyond the improvement of his mind gathered from reading the advertisement columns of things for sale, he got no benefit out of the advertising sheet. None of the articles offered at a sacrifice was at all in his way. When he had finished the perusal of the marvellous miscellany he took his eyes off the paper and stared straight at the brick wall before him.

He turned his mind back for the twentieth time on the events of yesterday.

There was not in the whole list of what had occurred a single incident that pleased him. He was a clear-headed man, and prided himself on his brains. He had neither the education nor the insolence to call his brains intellect. But he was very proud of his brains, and his brains were completely at a loss. As with all undisciplined minds, his had not the power of consecutive abstract thought. But it had the power of reviewing in panoramic completeness events which had come within the reach of its senses.

The result of his review was that he did not like the situation at all. There was a great deal about this scheme he

did not understand, and with such minds not to understand is to suspect and fear.

It was perfectly clear that for some purpose or other, Leigh hung back from entering upon the matter of their agreement, and now it seemed as though there might be a great deal in what Stamer feared, namely, that Leigh might have the intention of betraying them all into the hands of the police. Stamer had told him that in the talk at the Hanover, the night before, the landlord had informed the company under the seal of secrecy that Leigh on one occasion intrusted the winding up of the clock to a deputy who was deaf and dumb, and not able to write. That, no doubt, was the person they had seen in the clock-room the evening before, and not the dwarf. Leigh had not taken him into confidence respecting this clock, or this man who wound it up for him in his absence, but Leigh had taken him into confidence very little. It was a good thing that Leigh had not taken the gold from him. Of course, he was not such a fool as to part with the buttons unless he got gold coins to the full value of them, but still they might, if once in the possession of the little man, be used in evidence against him. The great thing to guard against was giving Leigh any kind of hold at all upon him.

He did not know whether to believe or not Leigh's account of the man in Birmingham. It looked more than doubtful. His talk about telegraphing and all that was only bunkum. The whole thing looked shaky and dangerous, and perhaps it would be as well for him to get out of it.

At all events he was pretty sure not to hear any more of the matter for a week or so. He should put it out of his head for the present.

He took up the newspaper this time with a view to amusement not business.

He glanced over it casually for a time, reading a few lines here and there. He passed by columns of parliamentary reports in which he took no interest whatever. Then came the law courts which he shunned. Finally he came upon the place where local London news was given. His eye caught a large heading, "FIRE AND LOSS OF LIFE IN CHELSEA." The paragraph was, owing to the late hour at

which the event took place, brief, considering its importance. It ran as follows :—

"Last night, between half-past twelve and one o'clock, a disastrous and fatal fire broke out in the bakery establishment of Mr. Forbes at the corner of Chetwynd Street and Welbeck Place, Chelsea. It appears from the information we have been able to gather, that the ground floor of the establishment is used as a baker's shop and the floor above as a store house by Mr. Forbes. The top floor, where the fire originated was occupied by Mr. Oscar Leigh, who has lost his life in the burning. The top floor is divided into three rooms, a sitting-room, a bed-room and a workshop. In the last, looking into Welbeck Place, the late Mr. Leigh was engaged in the manufacture of a very wonderful clock, which occupied fully half the room, and which Mr. Leigh invariably wound up every night between twelve and half-past twelve.

"Last night, at a little before twelve, Mr. Leigh left the Hanover public house, at the opposite corner of Welbeck Place, and went into the bakery by the private entrance beside the shop door in Chetwynd Street. In the act of letting himself in with his latch-key he spoke to a neighbour, who tried to engage him in conversation, but the unfortunate gentleman excused himself, saying he hadn't a minute to spare, as the clock required his immediate attention. After this, deceased was seen by several people working the winding lever of the clock in the window. At half-past twelve he was observed to make some unusual motions of his head, so as to give the notion that he was in pain or distress of some kind. Then the light in the clock-room was extinguished and, as Mr. Leigh made no call or cry (the window at which he sat was open), it was supposed all was right. Shortly afterwards, dense smoke and flames were observed bursting through the window of the room, and before help could arrive all hope of reaching the unfortunate gentleman was at an end.

"The building is an old one. The flames spread rapidly, and before an hour had elapsed the whole was burnt out and the roof had fallen in.

"At the rear of the house proper is an off building

abutting on Welbeck Mews. In this slept the shopman and his wife. This bakehouse also took fire and is burned out, but fortunately the two occupants were saved by the fire escape which had been on the spot ten minutes after the first alarm.

"It is generally supposed that the eccentric movements of Mr. Leigh were the result of a fit or sudden seizure of some other kind, and that in his struggles some inflammable substance was brought into contact with the gas before it was turned out."

Timmons flung down the paper with a shout, crying "Dead! Dead! Leigh is dead!"

At that moment the figure of a man appeared at the threshold of the store, and Stamer, with a scowl and a stare, stepped in hastily and looked furtively, fearfully around.

"What are you shoutin' about?" cried Stamer, in a tone of dangerous menace. "What are you shoutin' about?" he said again, as he passed Timmons and slunk behind the pile of shutters and flattened himself up against the wall in the shadow of them.

"Leigh is dead!" cried Timmons in excitement, and taking no notice of Stamer's strange manner and threatening tone.

"I know all about *that*, I suppose," said Stamer from his place of concealment. He was standing between the shutters and the old fire-grate, and quite invisible to anyone in the street. His voice was hollow, his eyes bloodshot and starting out of his head. Notwithstanding the warmth of the morning, his teeth were chattering in his head. His bloodshot eyes were in constant motion, now exploring the gloomy depths of the store, now glancing savagely at Timmons, now looking, in the alarm of a hunted beast, at the opening into the street.

Timmons took little or no notice of the other man beyond addressing him. He was in a state of wild excitement, not exactly of joy, but triumph. It was a hideous sight to see this lank, grizzled, repulsive-looking man capering around the store, and exulting in the news he had just read, of a man on whom he had fawned a day before. "He's dead! The dwarf is dead, Stamer!" he cried again.

In his wild gyrations his hat had fallen off, disclosing a tall, narrow head, perfectly bald on the top.

"Shut up!" whispered Stamer, savagely, "if you don't want to follow him. I'm in no humour for your noise and antics. Do you want to have the coppers down on us?—do you, you fool?" He flattened himself still more against the wall, as though he were striving to imbed himself in it.

Timmons paused. Stamer's words and manner were so unusual and threatening that they attracted his attention at last. "What's the matter?" he asked, in irritated surprise. "What's the matter?" he repeated, with lowering look.

"Why, you've said what's the matter," said Stamer, viciously. "And you're shouting and capering as if you wanted to tell the whole world the news. This is no time for laughing and antics, you fool!"

"Who are you calling a fool?" cried Timmons, catching up an iron bar and taking a few steps towards the burglar.

"You, if you want to know. Put that down. Put that bar down, I say. Do it at once, and if you have any regard for your health, for your life, don't come a foot nearer, or I'll send you after him! By —, I will!"

Timmons let the bar fall, more in astonishment than fear. "What do you mean, you crazy thief? Have they just let you out of Bedlam, or are you on your way there? Anyway, it's lucky the place is handy, you knock-kneed jail-bird! Why he's shaking as if he saw a ghost!"

"Let me alone and I'll do you no harm. I don't want to have *two* on me."

"What does the fool mean? I tell you Leigh is dead."

"Can you tell me who killed him? If you can't, I can." He pointed to himself.

"What!" cried Timmons, starting back, and not quite understanding the other's gesture.

"Now are you satisfied? I thought you guessed. I wouldn't have told you if I didn't think you knew or guessed. Curse me, but I am a fool for opening my mouth! I thought you knew, and that, instead of saying a good word to me, you were going to down me and give me up."

Timmons stepped slowly back in horror. "You!" he

whispered, bending his head forward and beginning to tremble in every limb. "You! You did it! You did this! You, Stamer!"

Stamer merely nodded, and looked like a hunted wild beast at the opening. He wore the clothes of last night, but was without the whiskers or beard. All the time he cowered in the shelter of the shutters, he kept his right hand behind his back.

Timmons retreated to the other wall, and leaned his back against it, and glared at the trembling man opposite.

"For God's sake don't look at me like that. You are the only one that knows," whined Stamer, now quite unmanned. "I should not have told you anything about it, only I thought you knew, when I heard you say he was dead. You took me unawares. Don't stare at me like that, for God's sake. Say a word to me. Call me a fool, or anything you like, but don't stand there staring at me like that. If 'twas you that did it, you couldn't be more scared. Say a word to me, or I'll blow my brains out! I haven't been home. I am afraid to go home. I am not used to this—yet. I thought I had the nerve for anything, and I find I haven't the nerve of a child. I am afraid to go home. I am afraid to look at my wife. I thought I shouldn't be afraid of you, and now you scare me worse than anything. For the love of God, speak to me, and don't look at me like that. I can't stand it."

"You infernal scoundrel, to kill the poor foolish dwarf!" whispered Timmons. His mouth was parched and open. The sweat was rolling down off his forehead. He was trembling no longer. He was rigid now. He was basilisked by the awful apparition of a man who had confessed to murder.

Stamer looked towards the opening, and then his round, bloodshot eyes went back to the rigid figure of Timmons. "I don't mind what you say, if you'll only speak to me, only not too loud. No one can hear us. I know that, and no one can listen at the door, without our seeing him. You don't know what I have gone through. I have not been home. I am afraid to go home. I am afraid of everything. You don't know all. It's worse than you think. It's enough to drive one mad——"

"You murderous villain!"

"It's enough to drive any man mad. I've been wandering about all night. I am more afraid of my wife than of anyone else. I don't know why, but I tremble when I think of her, more than of the police, or—or—or——"

"The hangman?"

"Yes. You don't know all. When you do, you'll pity me——"

"The poor foolish dwarf!"

"Yes. I was afraid he'd betray us—you——"

"Oh, villain!"

"And I got on a roof opposite the window, and when he was working at the lever, I fired, and his head went so—and then so—and then so——"

"Stop it, you murderer!"

"Yes. And I knew it was done. The neck! Yes, I knew the neck was broken, and it was all right."

"Oh! Oh! Oh, that I should live to hear you!"

"Yes. I thought it was all right, and it was in one way. For he tumbled down on his side, so——"

"If you don't stop it, I'll brain you!"

"Yes. And I got down off the roof and ran. I couldn't help running, and all the time I was running I heard him running after me. I heard him running after me, and I saw his head wagging so—so—so, as he ran. Every step he took, his head wagged, so—and so—and so——"

"If you don't stop that——"

"Yes. I will. I'll stop it. But I could not stop *him* last night. All the time I ran I couldn't stop him. His head kept wagging and his lame feet kept running after me, and I couldn't stop the feet or the head. I don't know how long I ran, or where I ran, but I could run no more, and I fell up against a wall, and then *it* overtook me! I saw *it* as plainly as I see you—plainer, I saw it——"

The man paused a moment to wipe his forehead.

"Do you hear?" he yelled, suddenly flinging his arms up in the air. "Do you hear? Will you believe me now? The steps again! The lame steps again. Do you hear them, you fool?"

"Mad!"

"Mad, you fool! I told you. Look!"

The figure of a low-sized, deformed dwarf came into the opening and crossed the threshold of the store.

With a groan Stamer fell forward insensible.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LEIGH CONFIDES IN TIMMONS.

TIMMONS uttered a wild yell, and springing away from the wall fled to the extreme end of the store, and then faced round panting and livid.

"Hah!" said the shrill voice of the man on the threshold. "Private theatricals, I see. I did not know Mr. Timmons, that you went in for such entertainments. They are very amusing I have been told; very diverting. But I did not imagine that business people indulged in them in their business premises at such an early hour of the day. I am disposed to think that, though the idea is original, the frequent practice of such scenes would not tend to increase the confidence of the public in the disabled anchors, or shower-baths, or invalid coffee-mills, or chain shot, or rusty fire-grates, it is your privilege to offer to the consideration of customers. Hah! I may be wrong, but such is my opinion. Don't you think, Mr. Timmons, that you ought to ring down the curtain, and that this gentleman, who no doubt represents the villain of the piece confronted with his intended victim, had better get up and look after his breakfast?" He pointed to the prostrate Stamer, who lay motionless upon the sandy floor.

Timmons did not move or speak. The shock had, for the moment, completely bereft him of his senses.

"I have just come back from the country," said the dwarf, "and I thought I'd call on you at once. I should like to have a few moments' conversation with you, if your friend and very able supporter would have the kindness to consider himself alive and fully pardoned by his intended victim."

"Hush!" cried Timmons. uttering the first sound. The

words of the hunchback, although uttered in jest, had an awful significance for the dazed owner of the place.

"Hah! I see your friend is not fabled to be in heart an assassin, but the poor and hard-working father of a family, who is just now indulging in that repose which is to refresh him for tackling anew the one difficulty of providing board and lodging and raiment for his wife and little ones. But, Mr. Timmons, in all conscience, don't you think you ought to put an end to this farce? When I came in I judged by his falling down and some incoherent utterance of yours that you two were rehearsing a frightful tragedy. Will you oblige us by getting up, sir? The play is over for the present, and my excellent friend Timmons here is willing to make the ghost walk."

The prostrate man did not move.

Timmons shuddered. He made a prodigious effort and tried to move forward, but had to put his hand against the wall to steady himself.

Leigh approached Stamer and touched him with his stick. Stamer did not stir.

"Is there anything the matter with the man? I think there must be Timmons. What do you mean by running away to the other end of the place? Why this man is unconscious. I seem to be fated to meet fainting men."

Timmons now summoned all his powers and staggered forward. Leigh bent over Stamer, but, although he tried, failed to move him.

Timmons regained his voice and some of his faculties. "He has only fainted," said he, raising Stamer into a sitting posture.

Stamer did not speak, but struggled slowly to his feet, and assisted by Timmons walked to the opening and was helped a few yards down the street. There the two parted without a word. By the time Timmons got back he was comparatively composed. He felt heavy and dull, like a man who has been days and nights without sleep, but he had no longer any doubt that Oscar Leigh was present in the flesh.

"Are we alone?" asked Leigh impatiently on Timmons's return.

"We are."

"Hah! I am glad we are. If your friend were connected

with racing I should call him a stayer. I came to tell you that I have just got back from Birmingham. I thought it best to go there and see again the man I had been in treaty with. I not only saw him but heard a great deal about him, and I am sorry to say I heard nothing good. He is, it appears, a very poor man, and he deliberately misled me as to his position and his ability to pay. I am now quite certain that if I had opened business with him I should have lost anything I intrusted to him, or if not all, a good part. Hah !”

“Then I am not to meet you *at the same place*, next Thursday night ?” asked Timmons, with emphasis on the tryst. He had not at this moment, any interest in the mere business about which they had been negotiating. He was curious about other matters. His mind was now tolerably clear, but flabby and inactive still.

“No. There is no use in your giving me the alloy until I see my way to doing something with it, and I feel bound to say that after this disappointment in Birmingham, I feel greatly discouraged altogether. Hah ! You do not, I think you told me, ever use eau-de-cologne ?”

“I do not.”

“Then you are distinctly wrong, for it is refreshing, most refreshing.” He sniffed up noisily some he had poured into the palm of one hand and then rubbed together between the two. “Most refreshing.”

“Then, Mr. Leigh, I suppose we are at a standstill ?”

“Precisely.”

“What you mean, I suppose, Mr. Leigh, is that you do not see your way to going any further ?”

“Well, yes. At present I do not see my way to going any further.”

Timmons felt relieved, but every moment his curiosity was increasing. There was no longer any need for caution with this goblin, or man, or devil, or magician. If Leigh had meant to betray him, the course he was now pursuing was the very last he would adopt.

“You went to Birmingham yesterday. May I ask you by what train you went down ?”

“Two-thirty in the afternoon.”

“And you came back this morning ?”

"Yes. Just arrived. I drove straight here, as I told you."

"And you were away from half-past two yesterday until now. You were out of London yesterday from two-thirty until early this morning?"

"Yes; until six this morning. Why are you so curious? You do not, I hope, suspect me of saying anything that is not strictly true?" said Leigh, throwing his head back and striking the sandy floor fiercely with his stick.

"No. I don't *suspect* you of saying anything that is not strictly true."

The emphasis on the word *suspect* caught Leigh's attention. He drew himself up haughtily and said, "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, sir," said Timmons, shaking his minatory finger at him, and frowning heavily, "not that I suspect you of lying, but that I am sure you are lying. I was at the Hanover last night, you were there too."

Leigh started and drew back. He looked down and said nothing. He could not tell how much this man knew. Timmons went on:

"I was in the public bar, against the partition that separates it from the private bar, when you came in. You called for rum hot, and you went away at close to twelve o'clock to wind up your clock. I went out then and saw you at the window winding up the clock. I was there when the light went out just at half-past twelve. Now, sir, are you lying or am I?"

Leigh burst into a loud, long, harsh roar of laughter that made Timmons start, it was so weird and unexpected. Then the dwarf cried, "Why you, sir, you are lying, of course. The man you saw and heard is my deputy."

"You lie. I heard about your deputy. He is a deaf and dumb man, who can't write, and is as tall as I am, a man with fair hair and beard."

"My dear sir, your language is so offensive I do not know whether you deserve an explanation or not. Anyway, I'll give you this much of an explanation. I have two deputies. One of the kind you describe, and one who could not possibly be known by sight from myself."

"But I have more than sight, even if the two of you

were matched like two peas. I heard your voice, and all your friends in the bar knew you and spoke to you, and called you Mr. Leigh. It was you then and there, as sure as it is you here now." Timmons thought, "Stamer when he fired must have missed Leigh, and Leigh must have gone away, after, for some purpose of his own, setting fire to the place. He is going on just as if the place had not been burned down last night, why, I am sure I do not know. I can't make it out, but anyway, Stamer did not shoot him, and he is pretending he was not there, and that he was in Birmingham. He's too deep for me, but I am not sure it would not be a good thing if Stamer did not miss him after all."

The clockmaker paused awhile in thought. It was not often he was posed, but evidently he was for a moment at a nonplus. Suddenly he looked up, and with a smile and a gesture of his hands and shoulders, indicating that he gave in :

"Mr. Timmons," he said suavely, "you have a just right to be angry with me for mismanaging our joint affair, and I own I have not told you quite the truth. I did *not* go to Birmingham by the two-thirty yesterday. I *was* at the Hanover last night just before twelve, and I did go into Forbes's bakery as you say. But I swear to you I left London last night by the twelve-fifteen, and I swear to you I did not wind up my clock last night. It was this morning between four and five o'clock I found out in Birmingham that the man was not to be trusted. You will wonder where I made inquiries at such an hour."

"I do, indeed," said Timmons scornfully.

"I told you, and I think you know, that I am not an ordinary man. My powers, both in my art and among men, are great and exceptional. When I got to Birmingham this morning, I went to—where do you think?"

"The devil!"

"Well, not exactly, but very near it. I went to a police-station. It so happens that one of the inspectors of the district in which this man lives is a great friend of mine. He was not on duty, but his name procured for me, my dear Mr. Timmons, all the information I desired. I was able to learn all I needed, and catch the first train back to

town. You see now how faithfully I have attended to our little business. I left the Hanover at five minutes to twelve, and at two minutes to twelve I was bowling along to Paddington to catch the last train, the twelve-fifteen."

"That, sir, is another lie, and one that does you no good. At twelve-fifteen I saw you as plain as I see you now—for although there was a thin curtain, the curtain was oiled, and I could see as if there was no curtain, and the gas was up and shining on you—I say *at fifteen minutes after twelve I saw you turn around and nod to your friends in the bar.* It's nothing to me now, as the business is off, but I stick to what I say, Mr. Leigh."

"And I stick to what I say."

"Which of the says?" asked Timmons contemptuously. "You have owned to a lie already."

"Lie is hardly a fair word to use. I merely said one hour instead of another, and that does not affect the substance of my explanation about Birmingham. I told you two-thirty, for I did not want you to be troubled with my friend the inspector."

This reference to a police-station and inspector would have filled Timmons with alarm early in the interview, but now he was in no fear. If this man intended to betray him, why had he not done so already? and why had he not taken the gold for evidence?

"But if you left Forbes's, how did you get away? Through the front-door in Chetwynd Street, or through the side-door in Welbeck Place?"

"Through neither. Through the door of the bakehouse into the mews."

Timmons started. This might account for Stamer's story of the ghost.

"But who wound the clock? I saw you do it, Mr. Leigh—I saw you do it, sir, and all this Birmingham tale is gammon."

"Again you are wrong. And now, to show you how far you are wrong, I will tell you a secret. I have two deputies. One I told that fool Williams about, and requested him as a great favour not to let a soul know. By this, of course, I intended that every one who enjoyed the privilege of Mr. Williams's acquaintance should know.

But of my second deputy I never spoke to a soul until now, until I told you this moment. The other deputy is a man extremely like me from the waist up. He is ill-formed as I am, and so like me when we sit that you would not know the difference across your own store. But our voices are different, very different, and he is more than a foot taller than I. You did not see the winder last night standing up. He always takes his seat before raising the gas."

A light broke in on Timmons. This would explain all. This would make Stamer's story consist with his own experience of the night before. This would account for this man, whom Stamer said he had shot, being here now, uninjured. This would make the later version of the tale about Birmingham possible, credible. But—awful but!—it would mean that the unfortunate, afflicted deputy had been sacrificed! Yes, most of what this man had said was true.

"What's the unfortunate deputy's name?" he asked, with a shudder.

"That I will not tell."

"But it must come out on the inquest, to-day or to-morrow, or whenever they find the remains."

"The remains of what?" asked Leigh, frowning heavily.

"Of your deputy. They say in the paper it was you that lost your life in the fire."

"Fire! Fire! Fire where?" thundered the dwarf, in a voice which shook the unceiled joists above their heads and made the thinner plates of metal vibrate.

"Don't you know? Haven't you seen a paper? Why Forbes's bakery was burnt out last night, and the papers say you lost your life in the fire."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WRONG MAN.

WHEN Timmons led the almost unconscious Stamer from the threshold, and left him a few yards from the door, the

latter did not go far. He had scarcely the strength to walk away, and he certainly had not the desire to go. He had borne two extreme phases of terror within the last twenty-four hours; he had suffered the breathless terror of believing he had taken human life, and he had imagined the spirit of the murdered man was pursuing him.

He had often, in thought, faced the contingency of having to fire on some one who found him at his midnight depredations, but he had not, until he formed the resolve of putting Leigh away, contemplated lying in wait for an unsuspecting man and shooting him as if he were a bird of prey.

Once it had entered his mind to kill Leigh, nothing seemed simpler than to do it, and nothing easier than to bear the burden of the deed. He had no hint of conscience, and there were only two articles in his code—first, that prison was a punishment not to be borne if, at any expense, it could be avoided; and, second, that no harm was to be allowed near Timmons. Both articles were concerned, inextricably bound up, in Leigh's life. He saw in the dwarf the agent, the ally of the police—the police, absolutely, in a more malignant form than the stalwart detective who, with handcuffs in his pockets, runs a man down. This Leigh was a traitor and a policeman together. It seemed as though it would be impossible for one human being to possess any characteristic which could add to the hatefulness of him who exhibited these two. And yet this Leigh was not only a traitor and a policeman combined, but an enemy of Timmons—a beast who threatened Timmons as well! Shooting was too merciful a death for such a miscreant. But then, shooting was easy and sure, so he should be shot.

The act itself had been very easy. There had been no more difficulty about it than about hitting the old hat in the shadow of the factory wall. But when the silent shot was sped and the air-gun disposed of by being carefully hung down the inside of a chimney and hooked to a copper-wire tie of the slate chimney-top, and he was safely down the water pipe and in the mews, the aspect of the whole deed changed, or rather it became another thing altogether.

Before pulling the trigger of the air-gun, he was perfectly

satisfied that Leigh deserved, richly deserved, death. That was as plain as the dome of St. Paul's from London Bridge. It had been equally plain to him that when Leigh was dead, and dead by his hand, he should never because of any compunction be sorry for his act. No sooner was he at the bottom of the water-pipe than he found he had no longer any control over his thoughts, or more correctly that the thoughts in his mind did not belong to him at all, but were, as it might be, thoughts hired in the interest of the dead man, hostile, relentless mercenaries, inside the very walls of the citadel within which he was besieged, and from which there was no escape except by flinging his naked bosom on the bayonets of the besiegers.

It made not the least difference now whether the man merited death a thousand times or not, that man insisted on haunting him. It did not now matter in the least how it pleased him to regard the provoker of that shot, it was how the murdered man regarded him was the real question. He had always told himself that a murdered man was only a dead man after all. Now he had to learn that no man ever born of woman is more awfully alive than a murdered man. He had yet to learn that the blow of the murderer endowes the victim with inextinguishable vitality. He had yet to learn that all things which live die to the mind of a murderer except the man who is dead. He had yet to learn that in the mind of a murderer there is a gradually filling in and crowding together of the images of the undamned dead that in the end blind and block up the whole soul in stifling intimacies with the dead, until the murderer in his despair flings himself at the feet of the hangman shrieking for mercy, for mercy, for the mercy of violent and disgraceful death in order to put an end to the fiendish gibes of the dead who is not dead but living, who will not sink into hell, but brings hell into the assassin's brain. The desire to kill is easy, and the means of killing are easy, but the spirit of the murdered man takes immortal form in the brain of the murderer and cleaves to him for evermore.

So that when Stamer descended from the roof and found himself in the yard of the mews, he was not alone. He had seen little of Leigh, but now all he had seen came back upon the eye of his memory with appalling distinctness. He saw

each detail of the man's body as though it were cast in rigid bronze and pressed forcibly, painfully, unbearably, upon his perception. He could see, he could feel, the long yellow fingers and the pointed chin hidden in the beard, and the hairs on the neck growing thinner and thinner as the neck descended into the collar. He could see the wrinkles about the eyes, and a peculiar backward motion of the lips before the dwarf spoke. He could see the forehead wrinkled upward in indulgent scorn, or the eyes flashing with insolent self-esteem. He could see. He could see the swift, sharp up-tilt of the chin when a deep respiration became necessary. There was nothing about the dwarf that he could not see, that he did not see, that he could avoid seeing, that was not pressed upon him as by a cold, steel die, that was not pressed and pressed upon him until his mind ached for the vividness, until he turned within himself frantically to avoid the features or actions of the dwarf, and found no space unoccupied, no loop-hole of escape, no resting-place for the eye, no variety for the mind. He was possessed by a devil, and he had made that devil into the likeness of Leigh with his own hands out of the blood of Leigh.

He had run, he did not know how long, or whither, but all the time he was running, he had some relief from the devil which possessed him, for he heard footsteps behind him, the footsteps of the dwarf. But what signified footsteps behind him, or the ordinary ghost one heard of, which could not take shape in day-light, or linger after cockcrow, compared with this internal spirit of the murdered man, this awful presence, this agonizingly minute portraiture at the back of the eye-balls where all the inside of the head could see it, when the eyes were shut, when one was asleep?

At the time Leigh overtook him, he was sure Leigh was dead. But when he found himself exhausted against the wall, and saw the dwarf go by, it was with a feeling of relief. This was the vulgar ghost of which he had heard so much, but which he had always held in contempt. But he had never heard of the other ghost before, and his spirit was goaded with terrors, and frantic with fears.

Then came that night of wandering, with inexpungeable

features of the dwarf sharp limned upon his smarting sight, and after that long night, which was a repetition of the first few minutes after the deed, the visit to Timmons, and the appearance of Leigh in the flesh!

No wonder Stamer was faint.

He was in no immediate fear now. He was merely worn out by the awful night, and prostrated by the final shock. All he wanted was rest, and to know how it came to be that the dwarf was about that morning, seemingly uninjured. As Leigh was not dead, or hurt, he had nothing to fear at present. He would rest somewhere from which he could watch Timmons, and go back to his friend as soon as the clock-maker disappeared. He sat down on the tail-board of an upreared cart to wait.

At length he saw the hunchback issue hastily from the store, and hasten, with pale face and hard-drawn breath, in the direction of London Road. Stamer kept his eyes on the little man until he saw him hail a cab and drive away. Then he rose, and, with weary steps and a heart relieved, hastened to the marine store.

The murdered ghost which had haunted the secret chambers of his spirit had been exorcised, by the sight of Leigh in the flesh, and he was at rest.

He found Timmons pacing up and down the store gloomily. "That's a good job, any way, Mr. Timmons," said the shorter man when he had got behind the shutters. This time he did not stand up with his back against the wall; he sat down on the old fire grate. He was much bolder. In fact, he sought cover more from habit than from a sense of present insecurity.

"Good job," growled Timmons. "Worse job, you mean, you fool."

"Worse job? Worse job, Mr. Timmons? Worse, after all you said, to see Mr. Leigh here, than to know he was lying on the floor under the window with a broken neck?" cried Stamer, in blank and hopeless amazement.

"Broken neck! Broken neck! It's you deserve the broken neck; and as sure as you're alive, Tom Stamer, you'll get it, get it from Jack Ketch, before long, and you deserve it."

"Deserve it for missing Leigh?" cried Stamer in a tone

of dismay. Nothing could satisfy Timmons this morning. First he was furious because he had killed Leigh, and now he was savage because the bullet had missed him !

"No, you red-handed botch ! Worse than even if you killed Leigh, who hasn't been all straight. But you have killed an innocent man. A man you never saw or heard of in all your life until last night. A man that came into Leigh's place privately, through a third door in the mews, and wound up his clock for him in the window, and nodded to the Hanover bar people, as Leigh used to do, and who was so like Leigh himself, hump and all, barring that he was taller, that their own mothers would not know one from the other. Leigh hired him, so that he might be able to go to Birmingham and places on *our* business, and seem to be in London and at his own place, if it became necessary to prove he had not been in Birmingham, if it became necessary to prove an alibi. And you, you blundering-headed fool, go and shoot the very man Leigh had hired to help our business ! You're a useful pal, you are ! You're a good working mate, you are ! Are you proud of yourself ? Eh ? You not only put your head into the halter of your own free will, and out of the cleverness of your own brains, but you round on a chap who was a pal after all. You go having snap shots, you do, and you bag a comrade, a man who did no one any harm, a man who was in the swim ! Oh, you are a nice, useful, tidy working pal, you are ! A useful, careful mate ! I wonder you didn't shoot me, and say you did it for the good of my health, and out of kindness to me. Anyway, I'm heartily sorry it wasn't yourself you shot, last night. No one would have been sorry for that, and the country would have saved the ten pounds to Jack Ketch for hanging you, and the cost of a new rope !"

"Eh ?" cried Stamer, not that he did not hear and understand, but in order that he might get the story retold.

Timmons went over the principal points again.

The burglar listened quite unmoved.

"You take it coolly enough, anyhow ?"

"Why not ? It was an accident."

"An accident ! An accident !" cried Timmons, drawing up in front of Stamer and looking at him in perplexity.

"Well, what could be plainer, Mr. Timmons? Of course, it was an accident. Why should I hurt a man who never hurt me?"

"But you did."

"They have to prove that. They *can't* prove I rounded on a pal. I can get a hundred witnesses to character."

"Nice witnesses they would be."

"But the coppers *know* I'm a straight man."

"They would hardly come to speak for you. It's someone from Portland would give you a character. But you know you fired the shot."

"At a screech-owl, my lord, at a screech-owl, my lord, that was flying across the street. You don't suppose, my lord, I'd go and round on a pal of Mr. Timmons's and my own?"

Timmons glared at him. "But the man is dead, and someone shot him."

"Well, my lord, except Mr. Timmons—and to save him I risked my own life, and would lay it down, and am ready to lay it down now or any time it may please your lordship—unless Mr. Timmons goes into the box and swears my life away, you can prove nothing against me, my lord."

"After all," said Timmons, looking through half-closed critical eyes at Stamer, "after all, the man has some brains."

"And a straight man for a friend in Mr. John Timmons."

"Yes, Stamer, you have."

Stamer stood up and approached Timmons. "You'll shake hands on that, Mr. Timmons?"

"I will." Timmons gave him his hand. "And now," he added, "I don't think you know the good news."

"What?"

"Why, Forbes's bakery was burned out last night."

"Hurroo!" cried Stamer, with a yell of sudden relief and joy. "My lord, you haven't a single bit of evidence against Tom Stamer. My lord, good-bye. Mr. John Timmons and Tom Stamer against the world!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RUINS.

THE morning following Hanbury's visit to Grimsby Street saw the order of arrival of the ladies in the sitting-room reversed. Mrs. Grace was there first. Edith had been too excited when she went to bed after the young man's disclosures to sleep, and it was not until the small hours were growing big that the girl could close her eyes. As a consequence, she was late.

But when at last she did awake, how different were her feelings from the day before! She could scarcely believe she was the same being, or it was the same world. That letter from Mr. Coutch, of Castleton, had plunged her into a depth of leaden hopelessness she had never known before. Now all was changed. Then she was the last of a race of shopkeepers; now she had for a cousin a man whose ancestor had been a king. Whatever fate might do against her in the future, it could never take away that consoling consciousness. At Miss Graham's in Streatham the girls used to say she ought to be a queen. Well, a not very remote relative of hers would have sat on a throne if she had lived and come into her rights! Prodigious.

She found her grandmother waiting for her. The old lady was seated in the window, spectacles on nose, reading the morning paper. All the papers of that morning had not an account of the disaster at Chelsea, because of the late hour at which it occurred. Mrs. Grace's paper was one that did not get the news in time for insertion that morning, so that the old lady and Edith were spared the pain of believing that a man who sat in this room yesterday had met with a sudden and horrible death.

But Mrs. Grace's eye had caught a paragraph headed "The Last of the Poles." Without a word or comment she handed the paper to the girl and said merely, "Read that. It ought to interest you."

Edith looked at the heading, flushed, and then read the paragraph. It ran:

"The last survivor of one of the great historical families of Europe was buried at Chone, near Geneva, four days before Christmas. The venerable Mathilde Poniatowski, the widow of Count Szymanowski, had just passed her ninetyeth year. Her family gave to Poland its last king, Stanislaus Augustus, under whose reign the death-struggle of the Polish nation began, and its last hero, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, who fell as one of Napoleon's generals when bravely attempting to cover the retreat of the French at the battle of Leipzig. The Tzar Alexander, with a generosity which did him credit, allowed his corpse to be buried in the church at Cracow amongst the old Kings and heroes of Poland. Count Szymanowski, the husband of the deceased lady, took a prominent part in the rising of the Poles in 1831, since which time she has lived a quiet and uneventful life in the hospitable republic of Geneva."

"And think," said Mrs. Grace, "that she who is just dead represented only the younger branch of Mr. Hanbury's family. It is all more like an Eastern romance than anything which could take place in Europe!"

Edith could not say much. She felt choking, and merely said it was wonderful, and that Mr. Hanbury would no doubt know all about the countess.

"I don't think so. You know he said he did not know much of the family. I must cut out this paragraph and keep it for him."

The notion of cutting a paragraph out of a penny paper and giving it to the head of the house here referred to, was grotesque. Besides, he had not said that he should come again. He said his mother would call, and he expressed a vague hope that they might be better friends. Edith knew no practical importance was to be attached to this man's parentage, as far as honours went; but still it could not be that he would move about as freely now as of yore, or mingle with the people he had formerly considered his equals. He could no more destroy the stream of noble and kingly blood in his veins than a costermonger could carry the arms of a Howard or a Percy.

Edith broke bread that morning, but made little more than a formal meal. Mrs. Hanbury would of course call.

When? And what would she be like? The son had been much too condescending and familiar for one in his position. Would his mother make up in stateliness what he left aside? She would drive up between three and five with powdered footmen. The arrival of the carriage, and the footmen, and Mrs. Hanbury, mother of the well-known Mr. Hanbury, would be an event in Grimsby Street. Her old resolution of not knowing rich people must be waived in this case. There was no remedy for it; for he had said his mother would come.

Neither grandmother nor grand-daughter was in humour for talk. Edith was occupied with her own thoughts. They had nothing to do that day, for Edith had made up her mind to do nothing about a new situation until Monday. It being now Saturday, there was no time to take any steps that week.

They had not sat down to breakfast until half-past nine, and by ten they had not finished. As the little clock on the mantel-piece struck the hour the landlady's daughter entered to say a lady was below who desired to see Mrs. and Miss Grace.

Both rose. Whom could it be?

Mrs. Hanbury.

"I have taken the liberty of coming up without permission," said a voice at the door, and a tall, stately lady, with white hair and dressed in black, appeared at the threshold of the door left open by the attendant.

Mrs. Grace invited her to enter and be seated.

"I need not introduce myself further," the visitor said with a smile, as she sat down, after shaking hands with the two; "than to say I am the mother of Mr. Hanbury, who had the pleasure of calling upon you yesterday evening. I am afraid my visit this morning is as inconveniently early as his last night was late. But the discovery of the relationship between us is so extraordinary, and so pleasant to me, that I could not deny myself the happiness of calling at the very earliest moment I could get away. You have not even finished breakfast. I fear you will find it hard to forgive me." Her words, and smile, and manner were so friendly and unassuming, that grandmother and grand-daughter felt at ease immediately.

Mrs. Grace said that if the visitor would forgive the disorder of the table, they should have no reason to feel anything but extremely grateful to Mrs. Hanbury for coming so soon.

Mrs. Hanbury bowed and said, "I saw my son on his return from Derbyshire yesterday and when he came back from you last night. But he had not come down when I was leaving home just now. I am a very positive, self-willed old woman, and I have to ask you as a favour to make allowances for these infirmities. I have made up my mind that the best thing for us to do is to hold a little family council, and I have grown so used to my own room I never can feel equal to discussing family matters anywhere else. I have therefore come to ask you a favour to begin with. Do humour me, please, and come with me to my place. John will be down and done breakfast by the time we get there, and we four can talk over all this wonderful story at our leisure."

There were objections and demurs to this, but Mrs. Hanbury's insistent, good-humoured determination prevailed, and the end was that the three ladies set out together on foot for Chester Square. "And now," said Mrs. Hanbury, as they walked along, "that I have tasted the delights of conquest, I mean to turn from a mild and seemingly reasonable suppliant into a rigid tyrant. Back into that dreadful Grimsby Street neither of you shall ever go again. It is quite enough to destroy one's zest for life merely to look down it!"

The protests and demurs were more vehement than before.

"We shall not argue the point now. In my capacity of tyrant, I decline to argue anything. But we shall see—we shall see."

When they reached Mrs. Hanbury's, they went straight to her own room. She left word that she was most particularly engaged, and could see no one. On inquiring for her son, she heard with surprise that he had come down shortly after she left and gone out without leaving any message for her.

That morning John Hanbury awoke to the most unpleasant thoughts about Dora. What ought he to do in

the matter? Had he not acted badly to her in not writing the next morning after the scene in the drawing-room?—the very night?

Unquestionably it would have been much better if he had written at once. But then at the time he reached home, he was in no state of mind to write to any one, and when he read his father's letter, the contents of it drove all other matters into the background, and made it seem that they could easily wait. Now he had been to Derbyshire, and knew all that was to be learned at Castleton, and had seen Mrs. Grace and Miss Grace and told them of the discovery he had made. His mother had undertaken to go and see them, and for the present there was nothing to press in front of his thought of Dora.

He had behaved very badly indeed to her. At the interview he had acted more like a lunatic brute than a sane gentleman, and afterwards his conduct had been—yes, cowardly. Curse it! was he always to behave like a coward in her eyes? She had reproached him with cowardice the other day, and he fully deserved her reproach. That is, he fully deserved the reproach of an impartial and passionless judge. But was the attitude of an impartial and passionless judge exactly the one a man expected from his sweetheart? Surely the ways of life would be very dusty and dreary if a man found his severest critics always closest to his side, if any deficiencies in the public indictment of his character or conduct were to be supplied by a voice from his own hearth, by his other self, by his wife?

John Hanbury had from his first thinking of Dora, more than of any other girl he had met, looked on her as a possible wife. When he went further and made up his mind to ask her to marry him, he had regarded her as a future wife more than a present sweetheart. He had felt that she would be a credit and an ornament to him and that they should get on well together. He had never for an hour been carried away by his feelings towards her. He had never lost his head. He told himself he had lost his heart, because he was more happy in her society than in the society of any other young woman he had met.

He was an imaginative man, of good education, strong impulse, and skilful in the use of words. Yet he had not

addressed a single piece of verse to her. She had not moved him to adopt that unfamiliar form of expression. He had nothing in his mind about her that he could not express in prose. This alone was a suspicious circumstance. He knew he was not a poet, and he felt it would be absurd to try to be a poet, because he was going to marry a woman he liked very much.

This was ample evidence she had not touched the inner springs of love in him. The young man who keeps his reason always about him, and won't make a fool of himself for the woman he wants to marry, isn't in love at all. There may be fifty words describing beautifully the excellence of his intentions towards the young woman, but love is not one of those words. He had felt all along that they were about to enter into a delicious partnership; not that he was going to drink the wine of a heavenly dream.

This morning he was wrestling and groaning in spirit when the servant brought the letters to his door. He recognised her writing at once, and tore the envelope open hastily.

He read the letter slowly and with decaying spirit. When he had finished he folded it up deliberately and put it back into the envelope. His face was pale, his lips were apart, his eyes dull, expressionless.

"Be it so," he said at length. "She is right," he added bitterly. "She is always right. She would always be right, and I when I differed from her always wrong. That is not the position a husband should occupy in a wife's esteem."

Then he sat down in the easy chair he had occupied two nights before and fell into a reverie. He did not heed how time went. When he roused himself he learned that his mother had gone out. He did not want to meet her now. He did not want to meet anyone. He wished to be alone with his thoughts. Where can man be more alone than in the streets of a great city?

He went out with no definite object except to be free of interruption. His mind ran on Dora. Now he thought of her with anger, now with affection, now with sorrow. He had no thought of trying to undo her resolve. He acquiesced in it. He was glad it came from her and not from him.

Now that all was over between them, and they were by-and-by to be good friends, and no more, he became sentimental.

He passed in review the pleasant hours they had spent together. He took a melancholy delight in conjuring up the things they had said, the places they had gone to, the balls, and theatres, and galleries and meetings they had been at with one another. He thought of the last walk they took, the walk which led to the present breach between them. It was in this neighbourhood somewhere. Ah, he remembered. He would go and see the place once more.

Once more! Why it was only two days since they had come this way, she leaning on his arm. What a wonderful lot of things had been crowded into those two days!

This was the street. What was the meaning of the crowd? When she and he were here last, there had been a crowd too. Was there always a crowd here? By Jove! there had been a fire. And, by Jove! the house burned was the one against the end wall of which she and he had stood to watch the nigger.

Policemen were keeping people back from the front of Forbes's bakery, which was completely gutted, standing a mere shell, with its bare, roofless walls open to the light of Heaven. All the floors had fallen, and a fireman with a hose was playing on the smoking rubbish within.

"An unlucky place," thought Hanbury, as he stood to look at the ruins. "First that unfortunate nigger meets with an accident there, and now this house is burned quite out. An unlucky corner."

At that moment there was a cry of dismay from the crowd. Hanbury drew back. He thought the walls were falling. Presently the cry of dismay changed to a cheer, and the crowd at the corner of the Hanover swayed and opened, and through it, from a cab which had just drawn up, walked hastily towards the smoking pile, Oscar Leigh.

Where Hanbury stood was the nearest point from which the dwarf could command a view of the bakery. When he reached Hanbury's side, he stopped, looked up, dropped his stick, flung his hands aloft and uttered an awful yell of despair.

The people drew back from him.

No trace of even the floor of the clockroom remained in position, beyond a few charred fragments of joists. Everything was gone, wheels and pulleys, and levers, and shafts, and chains, and drums, and bands. Even the very frame itself, with its four strong pillars and thick cross-bars, left not a trace aloft, and its very position was not indicated in the heap of steaming rubbish.

"All gone! All gone! The work of seven years. The result of a lifetime. Gone! gone! gone!"

He reeled and would have fallen but that Hanbury caught him and supported him.

Williams appeared and between Williams and Hanbury the dwarf was led into the private bar in which his learning and occult knowledge had brought him distinction and respect.

A chair was fetched by Binns the potman and Leigh was set upon it with his back to the window, so that his eyes might not look upon the grave of his labour.

"All gone! All gone! Nothing left! Nothing left! The work of seven years day and night! Day and night! Day and night! Gone, all gone!"

"But, Mr. Leigh," said the pale-faced Williams, in a low and very kindly voice, "it might have been ever so much worse."

"Worse! How could it be worse? There is nothing saved."

"Why, thank God, Mr. Leigh, you are saved. It was said in some of the papers and we all believed you were burned in the fire."

"And what if I was? I wish I was."

"You oughtn't to say that, Mr. Leigh. It is not right to say that. You ought to be grateful for being saved."

"Grateful for being saved! Who? I! Who should be grateful that I am saved? Not I, for one."

"Well, your friends are very glad, anyway. Didn't you hear how the people cried out with fear first, for they thought you were a ghost, and didn't you hear how they cheered then when they saw it was you yourself, alive and well?"

"I! Who am I? What am I? My clock, sir, was all I had in this whole world. It was the savings bank of my

heart, of my soul, and now the bank is broken and I am beggared."

"But, Mr. Leigh, you are not beggared indeed. You have plenty of money still," said Williams in the soft tone one uses to a reasonable child.

"Money, sir, what is money to me? I am not a pauper, but what good is mere money to me? Can I dance at balls, or ride fine horses or shoot? What good is money to me more than to get me food and drink for my body? and what a body! Who will feed my soul? What will feed my soul? How am I who am but a joke of nature to live with no spiritual food? My clock was my life, and my soul, and my fame, my immortal part and now—! Gone! gone! gone!"

"But how did you escape, Mr. Leigh? We saw you winding up after you left this, and you nodded to us as usual, when the easy part of the winding came, half-way through."

"I did. Curse my mandarin neck. If I had minded nothing but my clock it would be safe now, or I should be dead with it."

"But how did you escape, Mr. Leigh?"

"The devil takes care of his own, Mr. Hanbury," he said, speaking for the first time to the young man. "Whatever way you are going I should like to go, if you would have no objection? I have no way of my own now except the way common to us all."

"I shall be very glad to have your company," said Hanbury, who was sincerely moved at the loss and grief of the little clockmaker.

"Shall we walk or would you prefer to drive?"

"Let us drive, please. I have lost my stick. Ay, I have lost my crutch, my stick, my prop. You are very kind to let me go with you."

"Indeed I am very glad to be of any use I can."

And leaning on the arm of John Hanbury, Oscar Leigh limped out of the private bar of the Hanover.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OPEN CONFESSION.

WHEN the two men gained the open air no cab was in sight.

"If you will rest awhile here," said Hanbury, "I'll fetch a cab. I cannot see one up or down the street."

"No," said Leigh, a shudder passing through his frame. "Let us walk, if you do not mind. I could not bear to stay near this place any longer. Is it not strange that you should have wanted a cab in this spot forty-eight hours ago, and I should want it here now?"

"It is strange," said Hanbury, "but the world is very small, and our absolute wants in it are very closely circumscribed." The manner of Leigh had changed in a marked manner since they emerged from the door of the Hanover. His steps had become slow and more dragged, his breathing more laboured, and he had lost all swagger and bounce, and self-assertiveness.

"I know I am going very slowly. But I cannot get along quicker. I have had a great shock, and a slow step is becoming at a funeral."

"Pray, do not apologise. I assure you I have absolutely nothing to do."

"Nor I, nor shall I ever have anything to do in this world again. Sir, this slow pace befits a funeral. This is my funeral."

"Oh, you mustn't say so. I am sure your clock must have been a terrible loss, but not irreparable."

"Do you mean that the clock is reparable?"

"No. I am well aware the clock is past repair, but the loss may be repaired."

"No, sir. It may not. I do not want ever to see this street or that corner again. I have lived there seven years. I have toiled and planned there night and day for seven years, and now I am going away shorn of the growth of all my labours. Men of my make are never long-lived. When they meet a great shock and a great loss such as this they

die. There is a hansom, but don't call that. Call a four-wheeler. It is more like a hearse, and this is a funeral. Let us dress the rehearsal of the play, the real play, as well as we can. I am rather glad I am done with life——"

"Why, you are quite a young man yet, Mr. Leigh."

"I am rather glad I am done with life, I was saying, for I was beginning to tire of it. A man formed as I am has a weary up-hill fight. He must either play the part of the subtle beast, or go under, and a man who cannot ever stand up and fight for himself does not like to go under. It is not fair to ask a man who has never been able to put up his hands if he has had enough."

"But you will begin another great clock, even a greater one."

For a moment the little man fired up, and seemed about to regain his old insolent combativeness. "Sir, it would be impossible to design a greater."

"Well, let us say as great," said the young man soothingly. He was beginning not only to take an interest in this strange being, but to sympathise with him.

"No, sir. I shall begin no other clock. The sands in my own hour-glass are running low already. When a man of my make endures a great shock and a great disappointment he does not endure much more. He dies. I am glad to meet you again. I am glad it was your arm kept me from falling. I want you to be my friend. I have no friend on earth excepting my poor mother, who is more helpless than I myself. I know what I am asking when I say I want you for my friend. I would not ask you to be my friend the day before yesterday. I would have preferred you for an enemy then, for then I was strong and able to take care of myself. Now I am too weak to be your enemy, and I am fit only to be your friend. You will not spurn me?" He paused in their walk, and looked up anxiously into Hanbury's face.

"Assuredly not. I will do anything I can for you. Please let me know what I can do for you."

"I may presently. I may later. I may the last thing of all. But not now. Let us walk on. My clock is gone for ever, and on the ruins of my clock I have found a friend. I would much rather have my clock, ten thousand times

rather have my clock, than you, but then I knew it so long and so well. If you had made that clock as I had, and had lost it as I have lost it, you would go mad and kill someone, maybe yourself, or perhaps both."

"I am sure I should feel bitterly the loss of so many years of labour."

"Of so many years of labour and love and confidence and pride, the depository of so many hopes, the garden in which grew all the flowers of my mind. Well, while I had the clock, I had a friend in which I could confide. The clock is gone past recall. My mother cannot, poor soul, be expected to understand me. As you have promised to be my friend, I will confide in you. I know I may do so with safety."

"I think you may."

"It is past *thinking* in me: I *know*. I told you before, I never make mistakes about people." In all this talk Hanbury noticed that the old self-assertive "Hah!" had no place, nor was there any use of eau-de-cologne or reference to it. These had been nothing more than conversational fripperies, and had been laid aside with the spirit of aggression. The manner of aggression still prevailed in the form of thought and manner of expression. "You will be astonished to hear that I was attracted towards you from the moment I saw you in Welbeck Place—the attraction of repulsion, no doubt. But still you were not indifferent to me. I have had so long a life of loneliness and repression, I want a few hours of companionship and free-speaking before I die."

"Anything you may tell me to relieve your mind, I shall treat as a secret of my own—as a secret in keeping which my personal honour is concerned."

"I know. I wish I were as sure of anything else as I am of you. I tell you I never make mistakes about people. Never. I lied to you very considerably. I lied to everyone pretty considerably, partly because I have imagination, or fancy, or invention, or whatever you call the power of easily devising things that are not. I lied because I had imagination. I lied because I had vanity. I lied because people are such fools. How could a man tell the truth to a creature like Williams, the owner of that public-house?

The creature could not appreciate it. Besides, lying is so amusing, and I had so little amusement. I used lies as at once a sword and buckler. I cut down a fool with a lie; I defended myself against the silly talk of fools by holding up a lie with a brazen boss, the shining of which dazzled their eyes and choked their silly voices. I lied a good deal to you."

"Pray do not pain yourself by apologies. You said what you said to me merely for pastime."

"No; as an indication of my contempt for you. Did you not see I had a contempt for you? Did I not make it plain? Did you not see it?"

"Yes, I think you made it plain."

"I am glad of that, for my intention was to hurt you a good deal, and I hate to fail. I am very glad you saw I had a great contempt for you. This is my death-bed confession, and I shall keep back nothing, without warning you I am keeping something back."

"You are quite candid now, I am sure."

"Quite candid; as candid as a child is in its unspoken mind. What I said about those figures of time was mostly a lie."

"I guessed that."

"What I said about Miracle Gold was mostly a lie also."

"I knew that."

"You knew it! How could you know it? How can you *know* a negative any more than *prove* it, except by the evidence of your senses?—and then you do not *know*, you only fail to perceive."

"Well, let us not get into metaphysics."

"All right. *Most* of what I told you about Miracle Gold was a lie. *All* I told you about making it was a lie. I was about to enter into a league with thieves to take stolen gold, and pretend to make it. I was going to do this for the sake of the fame, not the profit."

"A very dangerous kind of alchemy."

"Yes; but very common, though not in its application to real metallic gold."

"It would be worse for us to get into a discussion on morals than even on metaphysics."

"It would. Anyway I have told you what my scheme was. I told Mrs. Ashton that my clock was independent of my hands for winding up. You heard Williams, the publican, say they saw me wind up my clock last night. Well I was not near my clock last night."

"But he said he saw you."

"He did. Now you can understand how necessary it was for me to lie."

"I candidly confess I cannot."

"Well to me it would be unbearable that a man like Williams should know of all my actions. I was not near my clock, not in the same room with it, not on the floor where it stood, from the early afternoon of yesterday. When I conceived the notion of making Miracle Gold I knew I ran a great risk. I thought it might become necessary to prove *affirmatives* at all events. The proposition of an alibi is an affirmative, the deduction a negative. I told you my clock was my friend. Well, I made it help me in this. I gave out in the private bar of the Hanover that my clock had now become so complicated that I had arranged to connect all the movements, which had hitherto been more or less independent, awaiting removal to a tower. I said I was going to get all my power from one force, weights in the chimney. Hitherto, I had said, I used springs and weights. I said this change would involve half-an-hour's continual winding every night, with a brief break of a few seconds in the middle of the half-hour. The clock was to be wound up by a lever fixed near the window, at which I sat when at work, the only window in the room. Night after night I worked at this lever for half-an-hour, turning round exactly at a quarter-past twelve to nod at the landlord of the Hanover and the people in the private bar. Meanwhile, I was busy constructing two life-sized figures. One of the body of a man in every way unlike me. The other of a man who should be as like me as possible. I have skill, a good deal of skill, in modelling. The face and figure unlike mine were the first finished. Both were made to be moved by the lever, not to move it. I easily timed the head so as to turn at a quarter-past. I inserted in the neck of the figure like myself a movement which would make the head nod

before turning away to go on with the winding. You now see my idea?"

"Not quite clearly. But I suspect it."

"Suppose I had to meet one of my clients about the gold, I should make an appointment with him at a quarter past twelve in Islington, or Wapping, or Wandsworth, or Twickenham. My clock, at twelve o'clock, slowly raised the figure from the floor to the place in which I sat in my chair, turned up the gas, which had been dimmed to the last glimmer that would live, and then released the weight in the chimney and set the figure moving as if working the lever, instead of the lever working it. Thus you see I should have a dozen to swear they saw me in my room at Chelsea, if anything went wrong in my interviews with my clients, or if from any other cause it became necessary for me to prove I was in my workshop between twelve and half-past twelve at night."

"Very ingenious indeed."

"The night before I met you in Welbeck Place, that is to say, Wednesday night, I tried my first figure, the figure of the man unlike me."

"May I ask what was the object of this figure? Why had you one that was not like you?"

"To give emphasis to the figure of myself. I at first intended going into the Hanover on Wednesday and declaring that I had been obliged to employ a deputy in case of anything preventing my being able to attend between twelve and half-past. I had intended spending the half hour the figure was visible in the bar, but I changed my mind. I went to the country instead, and imparted as a secret to the landlord that I was to have a deputy that night, and that he was to keep an eye on him and see he did not shirk his work. I knew Williams could no more keep a secret of that kind than fly. I did not want him to keep it. My motive in cautioning him was merely that he might watch closely, for of course I was most anxious that the delusion should be complete and able to bear the test of strict watching from the private bar. I went down to the country partly to be out of the way and partly for another reason I need not mention."

Hanbury started. The excitement of seeing the place

burned out, and meeting the dwarf and listening to his strange tale, had prevented him recollecting the connection between Edith Grace and Leigh. "Go on," said Hanbury, wishing the clockmaker to finish before he introduced the name of Edith.

"There is not much more to tell. Owing to a reason I need not mention, I made up my mind on Thursday morning to go on with the production of *Miracle Gold*. I resolved against my better judgment, and gave the word for the first lot of the gold to be delivered at my place at midnight exactly. You know how my afternoon was spent. While at Mrs. Ashton's my better judgment and my worse one had a scuffle, and I made up my mind to decide upon nothing that night, and certainly to commit myself to nothing that night. What you would call the higher influence was at work."

"Pallas-Athena?"

"Yes, if you think that a good name. Any way I made up my mind to do nothing definite in the interest of *Miracle Gold* that night. I set my dummy figure and left my house at midnight exactly, saw my client and told him I could do nothing for a week. Next day I heard from Williams that I had wound up my clock and nodded at a quarter-past twelve, right time. Last night I went into the Hanover, as you heard Williams say, and passed into my house after speaking a while to a friend in the street. But I did not go upstairs. I went through the house and out into the mews at the back. I was supplied by the landlord with keys for the doors into Chetwynd Street and Welbeck Place, but had not one for the bakehouse door into the mews until I got one made unknown to anyone. Thus the landlord and the people all round to whom I spoke freely would never dream of my going through into the mews. It was my intention they should have a distinct impression I could not do it. Thus I had the use, as it were, of a secret door. When I got into the mews I hastened to Victoria and caught the last train for Millway, the 12.15. I wanted to see my mother about business which I need not mention. I had made up my mind to have nothing to do with the *Miracle Gold*. On my way back to town I called on my client and learned

that the place was burnt down and that I was believed to be dead. The latter belief is only a little premature. I am going fast. Is there no cab? I can hardly breathe. Have you seen Miss Ashton since?"

"Since I saw you last?"

"Yes."

"I have."

"Since yesterday afternoon?"

"No."

Leigh gave a sigh of pain and stopped. "I am done," he said. "I can go no further. I shall walk no more."

"Nonsense, you will be all right again. Here is a cab at last, thank goodness!"

"You will come with me. You will not desert me. My confession is over. I shall speak of this matter no more to any man. It was only a temptation, and I absolutely did no wrong. You will not desert me. I am very feeble. I do not know what the matter is with me. I have no strength in my body. I never had much, but the little I had is gone. You will not desert me, Mr. Hanbury. I have only listened to the voice of the tempter. I have not gone the tempter's ways, and mind, I was not tempted by the love of lucre. If I had had a voice, and stature, and figure like yours I might have been able to win fame in the big and open world, as I was I could win it only in the world that is little and occult. Come with me. You promised to be my friend before you heard of my temptation. Are you less inclined to be my friend because I was tempted and resisted the tempter, than if I had never been tempted at all? Get in and come with me. See me under a roof anyway. The next roof that covers me will be the last one I shall lie under over ground."

"I own," said Hanbury, "I was a little staggered at first, but only at first. I am quite willing to go with you. Where shall I tell the man to drive?" Hanbury had assisted Leigh into the cab, and was standing on the flagway.

Leigh gave the address, and the two drove off.

The dwarf's confession had not benefited his position in Hanbury's mind. The fact that this man had been in communication with a fence, with a view to the disposal of stolen gold, was enough to make the average man shrink

from contact with the dwarf. But then Hanbury remembered that the secret had been divulged by the clockmaker in a moment of extreme excitement, and after what to him must have been an enormous calamity. To have been tempted is not to have fallen ; but, the temptation resisted, to have risen to heights proportionate to the strength of the temptation, and the degree of self-denial in the resistance of it.

Yet, this was a strange companion, friend, for John Hanbury, the well-known public speaker, a man who had made up his mind to adopt the career of a progressive and reforming politician, the descendant of Stanislaus II of Poland ! Contact with a man who had absolutely entertained the notion of trading in stolen goods was a thing most people would shun. But, then, were most people right ? This man had claimed his good offices, first, because Hanbury was in his power, and now Leigh claimed his good offices, because he was in great affliction and prostration. Certainly Hanbury would be more willing to fall in with Leigh's views now, when he was supplicating, than on Thursday, when he was threatening. Who could withhold sympathy from this deformed, marred, wheezing, halting, sickly-looking man, who had just seen the work of a life-time swept away for ever ?

Then Hanbury remembered he had questions to ask Leigh, and that his motive for keeping with him was not wholly pure. How many motives, of the most impersonal and disinterested, are quite pure ?

The young man did not know how exactly to introduce the subject of the Graces, and, for a moment, he hemmed and fidgeted in the cab.

At last he began, " You have not seen Mrs. Grace, since ? "

" No ; nor shall I ever again. "

" Why, you have not quarrelled with her, have you ? "

" Quarrelled with her ! Not I. But I have explained to you that I am going home, that this is a funeral ; my home is not in Grimsby Street. You did not say Grimsby Street to the cabman, I hope ? "

" I did not. I gave him 12, Barnes Street, Chelsea. Is not that right ? "

" Yes. That's right. No, I am not likely to see Mrs.

Grace again. How wonderfully like Miss Ashton Miss Grace is! Oh, I may as well tell you how I came to know Miss Grace, as she has really been the means of bringing us together as we are to-day. My mother is paralyzed, and I advertised for a companion for her. Miss Grace replied, and I engaged her. I said she should see little of me. But at the time it did not occur to me that I might like to see a great deal of her. I did not explain this before, for the explanation would have interrupted the story of my clock. Well, although you may hardly be able to credit it, I, who had, up to that time, avoided the crowning folly of even thinking of marriage, thought, not quite as calmly as I am speaking now, that I should like to marry a wife, and that I should like to marry her. She was to go to my mother on Wednesday. I was to test my automaton on Wednesday night. I ran down to my mother's place, and was at Eltham when Miss Grace arrived. My appearance there, after saying she should see me little, must have frightened her. I have often heard children call me bogie. At all events, she came back to town next day. Ran away, is the truth. Ran away from the sight of me, of bogie. If she had staid with my mother, I should have had something to think of besides Miracle Gold. It was upon seeing her and arranging that she was to go to Eltham, that my interest in Miracle Gold began to diminish, and I grew to think that my clock alone would suffice for my fame, and that I might marry and leave London, and live at Eltham. Well, she ran away, as I said, and I came back to London the same day, and made up my mind to go on with Miracle Gold. Then I met you and Miss Ashton, and I went to Curzon Street, and I thought, If Mrs. Ashton will let me come on Thursdays, and breathe another atmosphere, and meet other kinds of people, I still may be able to live without the excitement of Miracle Gold. And so I wavered and wavered, and at last made up my mind to give up the Gold altogether, and now the clock is gone, and I am alone. Quite alone. This is the house. It belongs to Dr. Shaw. He has looked after my health for years, and has promised to let me come here and live with him, when I haven't long to live. I have your address, and you have this one. Will you come to see me again?"

"Indeed I will."

"When—to-morrow? To-morrow will be Sunday."

"Perhaps I may come to-morrow. I shall come as soon as ever I can."

They were standing at the doorstep. Leigh had leaned his side against the area-railings for support. His breathing was terrible, and every now and then he gasped, and clutched his hands together.

"If you come, perhaps you may not come alone?"

Hanbury flushed. He did not want to make his confession just now.

"Perhaps I may not," he said. "Good-bye, now."

"Good-bye; and thank you for your goodness. You know whom I hope to see with you?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Pallas-Athena, of course."

"Of course."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FREE.

WITH a feeling of relief, Hanbury walked rapidly away. The last words of Leigh had stirred within him once more the trouble which had made him shirk meeting his mother that morning. The burning down of Leigh's place and the destruction of the wonderful clock, and the meeting with the unfortunate clockmaker, would afford a story to be told when he got home, and he might interpose that history between the first words of meeting and the ultimate announcement that the engagement between Dora and himself was at an end.

Family considerations or desires had nothing to do with the understanding which had existed between Dora and him; but to his mother, from whom he had no secret, except that of the quarrel on Thursday night, he must explain, and explain fully too. There was no good in putting off the inevitable meeting any longer. He knew his mother had

great respect and liking for Dora, but she had had nothing whatever to do with bringing about the understanding between the two of them. They had been quite as free in their choice of one another as though they had been the heroine and hero of a pastoral. He had never been a fool about Dora and she had never been a fool about him. In his life he meant to be no cypher among men; it would never do for him to be a cypher in his own home. Dora and he had acted with great reasonableness throughout their whole acquaintance, and with supreme reasonableness when they agreed to separate. If he had been an ordinary man, a man with no great public career before him, he might have been disposed to yield more to Dora's opinion or judgment; but as matters stood, any man with the smallest trace of common sense must commend Dora's decision of terminating the engagement, and his acceptance of her decision.

When he got back to Chester Square he heard, with great relief, that Mrs. and Miss Grace were at luncheon in the dining room with Mrs. Hanbury. The presence of the two visitors and the general nature of the conversation necessary to their presence and the meal, would serve as an admirable softener of the story he had for his mother's private ear.

"You see, John, I have succeeded," said Mrs. Hanbury, after greetings were over. "I went the moment breakfast was finished and carried Mrs. and Miss Grace away from that awful Grimsby Street. We have had a good long chat, and although I have done my best with Mrs. Grace I cannot induce her to promise not to go back to that murderous street again. I must now ask you to join with me in forbidding her to leave us."

Hanbury spoke in favour of his mother's proposal and urged many arguments; but the old woman was quite firm. Back they must and would go. Why, if no other consideration would be allowed to weigh, there was the fact that her grand-daughter had not yet received her luggage from Eltham House.

This reference brought in Leigh's name, and then Hanbury told of the fire, the destruction of the clock, his meeting that morning with the dwarf and the conviction of the

latter that he would not long survive the destruction of his incomparable machine. He noticed as he went on that Miss Grace first flushed and then paled.

The girl had hardly spoken up to this. She sat silent and timid. She did not seem to hear quickly or to apprehend accurately. She had hesitated in her answers like one afraid. The table was small, and laid for four people. Hanbury sat opposite his mother, Edith opposite her grandmother. The heat was intense.

There was a buzzing and beating in the girl's ears. She heard as through a sound of plashing water. The talk of Leigh had carried her mind back to the country, back to Millway and Eltham House, and to the unexpected and unwelcome and disquieting apparition of the dwarf at the door of the house when she arrived there.

Through this strange noise of splashing water she heard in a low far-away voice the story of her fear and loneliness and desolation on that Wednesday, separated from her old home and the familiar streets, and the sustaining companionship of her old grandmother, who had been all the world to her. She heard this story chanted, intoned in this low, monotonous voice, and she had a dim feeling that all was changed, and that she was now environed by securities through which she could not be assailed by the attentions of that strange, ill-featured dwarf.

But her sight was very dim, and she could not see anything clearly or recollect exactly where she was. Gradually her sight cleared a little, and she was under trees heavy with leaves, alone on a lonely road by night. The rain fell unseen through the mute warm air. A thick perfume of roses made the air heavy with richness. She felt her breath come short, as though she had walked fast or run. The air was too rich to freshen life, to cool the fevered blood.

Now she became dimly conscious of some sound other than the plashing of water. It was not the voice, for the voice had ceased. The sound was loud and distinct, and emphatic and tumultuous.

All at once she remembered what that sound was. She hastily put one hand to her left side, and the other to her forehead and rose, swaying softly to and fro.

"I—I——" she whispered, but could say no more.

Hanbury caught her, or she would have fallen. The two ladies got up.

"She is not well," said the old woman excitedly. "She has eaten nothing for days!"

The girl reclined, cold and pale as marble, in the young man's arms. Her eyes were half closed, her lips half open.

He half led her, half lifted her, to a couch. Restoratives such as stood at hand were applied, but she did not quite recover. She was not exactly unconscious. This was no ordinary faint.

The women were terrified. Mrs. Grace had never seen her in any such state before. To her knowledge the girl had never fainted.

The ladies were terrified, and Hanbury ran off for a doctor. When he came back, the girl had been got upstairs. She was still in the same state, not quite conscious, and not quite insensible.

The doctor made a long examination, and heard all that was to be told. When he came down to the dining-room, where Hanbury was excitedly walking up and down, he said the case was serious, but not exactly dangerous, that is, the patient's life was in no imminent peril. She had simply been overwrought and weakened by want of food, and jarred by suppressed and contending emotions. There was no organic disease, but the heart had been functionally affected by the vicissitudes of the past few days acting on an organism of exquisite sensibility. Quiet was the best medicine, and, after quiet, careful strengthening, and then the drugs mentioned in his prescription. But above all, quiet.

Could she be moved? Mrs. Grace asked.

By no means. Moving might not bring about a fatal termination, but it would most assuredly enhance her danger, and most certainly retard her recovery.

Would she recover?

There was no reason to fear she would not. All was sound but much was weak. Her anxiety of mind, and the excitement of going to that uncongenial home, and the long walk the morning she left, and the lack of food had weakened her much, but nothing had given way or was in immediate peril of giving way, and with care and quiet all would be well.

And when this was passed would she be quite well again?
Yes. In all possible likelihood under Heaven, quite well again.

It would leave no blemish in her life? No weak place? She would be as well as ever?

Well, that was asking a doctor to say a great deal, but it was probable, highly probable, she would be quite as well as if this had never happened. The key to her recovery lay in the one word, Quiet. After quiet came careful nurture and, a long way from the second of these, drugs. But recollect, Quiet.

Hanbury took up the prescription and hastened off with it.

The poor girl so sensitive and fragile! It was a mercy this illness came upon her here. How would it have fared with her down in that lonely Eltham House to which she had taken such a dislike? Why, it would have killed her.

What an exquisite creature she was, and so soft and gentle in her ways. It was fortunate this illness had not overtaken her in Eltham House, or in Grimsby Street, for that matter, because the street was detestable, and to be ill in lodgings must be much worse than to be ill in a public hospital, for in hospital there was every appliance and attendance, and in lodgings only noise, and bustle, and grumbling. It was dreadful to think of being sick in lodgings. And now Mrs. Grace and her grand-daughter were poor.

How horrible it would be to think of this girl lying stricken in that other house, and requiring first of all quiet, and then cherishing, and being able to get neither! It was dreadful to picture such things. And fancy, if these poor ladies had not enough money for a good doctor and what the poor weak child wanted! Fancy if they could not pay their rent and were obliged to leave. Oh! how fortunate it was he had come across them so soon, and how strange to think that Leigh had been the means of first bringing them together. He owed that good turn to Leigh.

On his way back from the druggist he reverted to the past of Leigh:

"Yes, I owed the introduction to him. I freely forgive him now. Indeed, I don't know what I have to forgive him of.

He did not send or write that paragraph to the papers. He did not even write it, as far as I know, and although he was rough and rude, and levied a kind of blackmail on me, the price he asked me was not disgraceful from his point of view. If I had met him under happy circumstances, I might have brought him to a Thursday at Curzon Street. He was interesting, with his alchemy and clock and omniscience and insolence and intellectual swagger. Of course, I did not at the time know he was in treaty with a fence. According to his own account he never committed himself in that quarter, and as he had no need to tell me of that transaction at all, I daresay he kept pretty near the truth. How strange that when he lost his clock, he must straightway get a confidant! I wonder is there any truth in his own prophecy about his health?

"He, too, was the means of breaking off the Curzon Street affair. I must write there at once. I have behaved badly in not doing so before. I'll write the moment I get home. Yes, I must write when I get back, and then I'll put the affair out of my mind altogether, for good and ever."

Upon getting to the house, he went to the library and read over Dora Ashton's letter once more, slowly. He gathered no new impression from this second reading. Her resolution to put an end to the engagement seemed to him more strong than at first. That was the only change he noticed in the effect of the letter upon him. It was as cool and business-like and complete as could be. He was too much of a gentleman to give expression in his mind to any fault-finding with the woman to whom he had been engaged, and whom he had behaved so badly towards the other evening, but it seemed quite certain to him now that Dora Ashton was a girl of great cleverness and good sense and beauty—but no heart.

He did not at all like the task before him, but it must be done. When the letter was finished, it ran:

"MY DEAR MISS ASHTON,

"I got your letter. It was very good of you to write to me in so kind and unrepublishing a spirit, and I thank you with all my heart for your merciful forbearance. My

conduct, my violence on Thursday evening, must always be a sorrow and a mystery to me. I only indistinctly recollect what I said, but I feel and know my words were perfectly monstrous and cruelly unjust. I feel most bitterly that no apology of mine can obliterate the impression my insanity must have made on you. To say I am profoundly sorry is only to say that I am once more in my right mind. I must in the most complete and abject manner beg your pardon for my shameful violence on Thursday evening. I must not even try to explain that violence away. I ask your pardon as an expression of my own horror of my conduct and of my remorse. But I do not hope for your forgiveness, I do not deserve it, I will not accept it. I shall bear with me in expiation of my offence the consciousness of my unpardonable conduct, and the knowledge that it remains unpardoned. Even lenity could ask no more indulgent treatment of my monstrous behaviour.

"As to terminating the engagement between us I have nothing to do but accept your decision, and since you ask it as a favour, the only favour you ever asked of me, I must receive your decision as irrevocable. I will not make any unpleasantness here by even referring to the difference of the ending I had in the hope of my mind. As you very justly say, the least said now the better. I shall say not a word to anyone about the immediate subject of this letter except to my mother. On that you may rely. I must tell her. You, I suppose, will inform Mrs. and Mr. Ashton (if they do not know of it); nobody else need hear of the abandonment of our designs. Let us by all means meet as you suggest, as though we never had been more than the best of friends, and were (as I hope we shall be), the best of friends still. I also quite agree with you about the notes, &c. Burn and destroy them. I will most scrupulously burn your letters, of which I have a few. This letter will I suppose be the last of the series.

"In a little time I trust we may meet again, but not just now for both our sakes.

"Yours ever most sincerely,

"JOHN HANBURY."

When he had finished the letter he closed it without read-

ing it over. "When one reads over a letter like this," he thought, "one grows nice about phrases and tries to alter, and finally tears up. I am satisfied that if I tried all day long I should do no better than this. I shall post it myself when I go out. That letter is a great weight off my mind, and now I am much less disinclined to break the matter to my mother. When that is over I shall feel that I am free."

He found his mother alone in her own room. Mrs. Grace was with Edith in a room which had been hastily prepared for her.

"She is just the same way," said Mrs. Hanbury. The young man had heard from a servant downstairs that there was no change. "We are not to expect much change for a while. She has quite recovered consciousness, but is very weak, and the doctor says she is not to be allowed to stir even a hand more than is necessary. There is no anxiety. With time and care all will be well."

"I am glad I found you alone, mother. I think you must have seen that I have been a good deal excited during the past few days."

"Yes, and very naturally too. That letter must have disturbed you a good deal."

The son paused in his walk and stared at her. "How did you know about that letter? Who told you? Have you seen Dora? But that is absurd. She would not speak of it."

Mrs. Hanbury looked at him in amazement and alarm. "What do you mean, John? You make me very uneasy. What has Dora Ashton to do with it? Miss Grace may, but not Dora. Surely you do not suppose I did not read your father's letter?"

"Oh!" he cried, "I did not mean my father's letter. I was referring to another letter. Upon reflection I quite agree with you and my father in attaching little or no importance to that discovery. I was thinking of a letter I had from Dora."

"Yes," said Mrs. Hanbury with a sigh of relief. For a moment she thought her son's head had been turned by the disclosure of his pedigree. "What does she say?"

He was walking up and down rapidly now. "Well, the fact is, mother, the thing is off."

"Off?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the thing is over between us, the engagement, you know. The fact is we had a scene on Thursday evening. I lost command of myself completely, and used very violent language——"

"To Dora!" cried the mother in bewilderment.

"Yes, to Dora. I don't know what came over me, but I was carried quite beyond myself and said things no gentleman, no man, ought to say to any girl——"

"John, I don't believe you—you are under some strange and miserable hallucination. You said something to Dora Ashton that no man ought to say to any girl! Impossible! Thank God, I know my son better than to believe anything of the kind," said Mrs. Hanbury, beginning in a manner of incredulity and ending in firm conviction.

"Unfortunately, mother, it is only too true. I need not repeat what passed, but the dispute——"

"Dispute—dispute with Dora! Why she would not dispute with you! How could she dispute with you? Dispute with you! It is nonsense. Why the girl *loves* you, John, the girl *loves* you. It is lunacy to say it!"

"I may have used an unhappy word——"

"A completely meaningless word, I assure you."

"At all events, we differed in opinion, and I completely lost my temper and told her in the end that in certain cases of importance she might betray me."

"Oh, this is too bad! I will not sit and listen to this raving. You never said such a childishly cruel thing to Dora Ashton. She is the noblest girl I know. The noblest girl I ever met."

"I was mad, mother."

"Most wickedly mad."

"Well, you do not know how sorry I am I allowed myself to be carried away. But that cannot be helped now. I must abide the consequence of my folly and madness. She has broken off the engagement, for we were engaged, and I have written saying I cannot disapprove of her decision."

We have agreed that as no one has known anything of the engagement no one is to hear of its being broken off. Are you angry with me, mother?"

"Angry—no; but greatly disappointed. I was as happy in thinking of Dora as your wife as if she were my own daughter, but I suppose I must become reconciled. If you and she have agreed to part no one has any right to say more than that it is a pity, and I think it is a pity, and I am very sorry."

That was the end of the interview of which the young man had stood in such dread, and now that it was over and he was going to post his last letter to Dora he felt relieved. The news had doubtless greatly surprised and shocked his mother, but this meeting had not been nearly so distressing as he had anticipated.

When he came to the post pillar into which he had dropped most of the letters he had written to Curzon Street, he felt an ugly twinge as this one slid from his fingers and he turned away—free.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DOCTOR SHAW'S VERDICT.

DR. SHAW, at whose house door Hanbury had left Oscar Leigh, was a fresh-coloured, light-haired, baldheaded, energetic man of about fifty-five. He was always in a state of astonishment, and the spectacles he wore over his green-grey eyes seemed ever on the point of being thrust forward out of their position by the large round prominent dancing eyes of their wearer. He was a bachelor and had a poor practice, but one which he preferred to hold in undisputed ownership, rather than increase at the sacrifice of liberty in taking a wife.

He had just come back from his round of morning visits and was sitting down to his simple early dinner, as Leigh knocked. When he heard who the visitor was he rose instantly and went into the small bare surgery, the front ground-floor room.

"Bless my soul, Mr. Leigh, what's the matter?"

Leigh was sitting in a wooden elbow-chair breathing heavily, noisily, irregularly. "I have come," he said in gasps and snatches, "I have come to die."

"Eh! Bless my soul, what are you saying?" cried the doctor, approaching the clockmaker so as to get the light upon his own back.

"I have come to die, I tell you."

"But that is an opinion, and it is I that am to give the opinion—not you. You are to state the facts, I am to lay down the law. What's the matter?"

"In this case, I am judge and jury. The facts and the law are all against me. I have had another seizure a few minutes ago," he laid his hand on his chest. "In the excitement I kept up, but I know 'tis all over. You will remember your promise about the quicklime. I never let anyone pry into the machinery of my clock, and I won't have any foolish young jackanapes prying into the works of this old carcase. You will fill up the box with quicklime?"

"Not yet anyway. What happened? Where do you feel queer?"

Leigh pointed to his chest a little at the left of the middle line.

"Shock?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"My clock, the work of seven years, has been burned, destroyed."

"Burned! That was hard. I'm very sorry to hear it. We'll have your coat off. Yes, I'll lock the door. You need not be afraid. No one comes at this time. Yes, I'll pull the blind down too. Stand up. . . . That will do. Put on your coat. Let me help you. Drink this. Sit down now and rest yourself."

"Rest myself? Rest myself! After standing for that half a minute?"

"Yes."

"Did I not tell you facts and law were against me?"

"You are not well."

"I am dying."

"You are very ill."

"I had better go to bed?"

"You would be more rested there."

"Would it be safe for me to go to Millway, about sixty miles?"

"No."

"How long do you think I shall last?"

"It is quite impossible to say."

"Hours?"

"Oh, yes."

"Days?"

"Yes."

"Weeks?"

"With care."

"Months?"

"The best thing you can do now is to go to bed. I'll see the room got ready. You feel very weak, weaker even than when you came in here."

"I feel I cannot walk."

"The excitement has kept you up so far. You are now suffering from reaction. After you have rested a while you will be better."

"Very good. Shaw, will you send for your solicitor, I want to make my will."

The doctor left the surgery for a few minutes to give the necessary orders about the room for Leigh and to send for the solicitor. Half an hour ago he had felt very hungry, and when the clockmaker knocked he had been thinking of nothing but his dinner. His dinner still lay untasted. He had forgotten all about it. He was the most kind-hearted of men, and the sight of Leigh in his present condition, and the fatal story he had heard through the stethoscope had filled him with pity and solicitude.

"The room will be ready in a few minutes," he said, in a cheerful voice and with an encouraging smile, when he again came into the surgery. "We shall try to make you as comfortable as ever we can. I am sorry for your sake I haven't a wife to look after you."

"If you had a wife I shouldn't be here."

"What! You! Why, that is the only ungallant thing I ever heard you say in all my life."

"I should envy you and be jealous of you."

"Then, my dear fellow, I am very glad we are by ourselves. I suppose your mother would not like to come up to nurse you?"

"She cannot move about now, except in her wheeled chair."

"Is there anyone you would wish to come to see you? This house you will, of course, consider as your own."

"Thank you, there is no one. I do not know anyone in the world, except my mother, so long as I know you. The only friend likely to call I saw to-day. There is no need for me to send for him to-day, is there?"

"Need, no. You will be much better when you have rested a while. You know cheerful company is always very useful to us doctors, and we like to have all the help we can. But I daresay we shall get on famously as we are." He would like to have heard all about the fire and the destruction of the clock, but he refrained from asking because he feared the excitement for his patient.

It happened that Dr. Shaw's solicitor lived near, and was at home, so that he came back with the boy before the room was ready. Shaw withdrew from the surgery, and for half-an-hour the lawyer and the clockmaker were alone. Then Leigh was carried upstairs and went to bed, and felt, as Shaw said he would, better and easier for lying down.

"I have no trouble on my mind now, Shaw, and my body cannot be a trouble to me or anybody else long. I never say thanks or make pretty speeches, but I am not ungrateful all the same. I don't think we have ever shaken hands yet, Shaw. Will you shake hands now?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear fellow," said Shaw, grasping the hand of the little man, and displaying his greatest pleasure by allowing his large dancing green-grey eyes to fill up with tears behind his unemotional spectacles.

"That clock would have made my fame. I don't know how the fire arose. I had the clock wound up last night by a mechanical contrivance, and before leaving for Millway I lit the faintest glimmer of gas. Some accident must have happened. Some accident which can now never be explained. I left the window open for the first time last night. I had put up a curtain for the first time last

night. If any boy had thrown a stone, and the stone got through the curtain, there is no knowing what it might not do among the machinery; the works were so close and complicated, it might have brought something inflammable within reach of the flame of the gas, for the gas would not be quite out. At all events, the clock is gone. It was getting too much for me. Often of late, when I was away from it, the movements became reversed, and all the works went backwards, and I often thought that kind of thing would injure my brain."

"It was a sure sign injury was beginning, and I think it is a good thing for you the clock is burned," said Shaw soothingly.

"But the shock! The shock you will say, by-and-by, killed me. How, then, do you count the loss of the clock good?"

"I mean if you had told me there was no way of stopping this involuntary reversal of the movement I should have advised you to smash the clock rather than risk the brain."

"And I should have declined to take your advice."

Shaw laughed. "You would not be singular in that. I can get ten people to take my medicines for one who will take my advice."

"What an awful mortality there would be, Shaw, if people took both?"

"There now," said Shaw, with another laugh, "you will do now. You are your old self again. I must run away. I shall see you in an hour or two, and have my tea up here with you. If you want anything, ring."

So Leigh was left alone.

"The clothes," he thought, "of the figure must have in some way or other come in contact with the gas-jet. If they once caught fire the wax would burn—the wax of the head, and then there would be plenty of material for a blaze.

"Ah, me; the clock is gone! Even if that survived, I should not mind. I was so jealous of it. I never let anyone examine it, and the things it could do will not be credited when I am dead, for I often, very often, exaggerated and even invented, a little.

"Ay, ay, ay, the clock is gone, and the Miracle Gold, too. I am glad I never had anything really to do with it. I am sorry I was not always of the mind I was yesterday—my last day at my bench. All the time I was burying in my own grave my own small capital of life, I was missing the real gold of existence. I sought to build up fame in my clock and in that gold. Fame is for the dead. What are the dead to us? What shall I be when they bury me to myself, who walked in the sunlight and saw the trees and the flowers, and the clouds and the sea, where there were no men to remind me of my own unshapeliness? Nothing. Why should a man care for fame among people he has never seen, among the dim myriads of faces yet to come out of the womb of time, when he could have had an abiding place in the heart's ingle among those whom he knows and whose hands he can touch? What good to us will the voices of the strange men of the hereafter be? What a fool I was to think of buying the applause of strange, unborn men out of gold rent from living men, whose friend I might have been.

"I told Hanbury I was making a dying confession to him. I suppose this is a death-bed repentance. Very well. But I sinned only in thought. In order to show other men I was better than they, I was willing to be worse. Shaw is right. I am much easier here. I feel rested. I feel quiet. I have really done nothing harmful to any man. It will be a relief to get out of this husk. I will try to sleep. My poor old mother! But we cannot be separated long. It is easier to die in a body like this than to live in it."

He was very weak, and life fluttered feebly in his veins. He closed his eyes and ceased to think. The calm that comes with the knowledge that one is near the end was upon him. He did not think, he did not sleep. He lay simply gathering quiet for the great sleep. He was learning how to rest, how to lie still, how to want not, how to wait the sliding aside of the mysterious panel that the flesh keeps shut against the eyes of the spirit while the two are partners in life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PATIENT AND NURSE.

MRS. HANBURY was greatly shocked by the news her son had given her that day about his relations with Dora. She had a conviction that it would be to John's advantage to be married. She held that, all other things being reasonably taken care of, a young man of twenty-six ought to marry and settle down to face the world in the relations and surroundings which should govern the remainder of his life. There had never been any consideration of John's sowing wild oats. He had always been studious, serious, domestic. He was the very man to marry and, in the cheerful phrase of the story book, live happy ever after.

And where could he find a wife better suited to him than in Curzon Street? Dora had every single quality a most exacting mother could desire in the wife of an only son, and Mrs. Hanbury was anything but an exacting mother. Dora's family was excellent. She was one of the most beautiful girls in London, she was extremely clever, and although she and he did not seem fully in accord in their views of some things, they agreed in the main. She was extremely clever and accomplished, and amiable, and by-and-by she would be rich. In fact, Mrs. Hanbury might have doubled this list without nearly exhausting the advantages possessed by Miss Ashton, and now it was all over between the pair. This really was too bad.

She idolized her son, and thought there were few such good young men in the world; but she was no fool about him. She had watched his growth with yearning interest from infancy to this day. She knew as well, perhaps better than anyone, that he was not perfect. She knew he was too enthusiastic, that sometimes his temper was not to be relied on. She knew he was haughty, and at rare times even scornful. She knew he had no mean estimate of his own merits, and was restive under control. But what were these faults? Surely nothing to affright any gentle and skilful woman from uniting herself with him for life.

Most of his faults were those of youth and inexperience. When he was properly launched, and met other men and measured himself against them, much of his haughty self-satisfaction would disappear. Most young men who had anything in them were discontented, for they had only vague premonitions of their powers, and they felt aggrieved that the world would not take them on their own mere word at their own estimate.

What Mr. and Mrs. Ashton would say she could not fancy. Perhaps they would imitate for once the example of younger people, and say nothing at all. They could not, however, help thinking of the matter, and they would be sure to form no favourable estimate of John's conduct in the affair. The rest of the world would be certain to say that John jilted the girl, and anyone who heard the true history of the Hanbury family, just come to light, would say that John kept back in the hope of making a more ambitious marriage.

He was, everyone allowed, one of the most promising young men in England, and now the glamour of a throne was around him. All the philosophy in the world would not make him ever again the plain John Hanbury he was in the eyes of people a few days ago, in the eyes of every one outside this house still. Stanislaus II. may have been everything that was weak and contemptible, and been one of the chief reasons why his unfortunate country disappeared from the political map of the world, but John Hanbury was the descendant of King Stanislaus II. of Poland, and if that monarchy had been hereditary and the kingdom still existed, her son would be the legal sovereign, in spite of all the Republicans and revilers in Europe.

She herself set no store by these remote and shadowy kingly honours, but even in her own heart she felt a swelling of pride when she thought that the child she had borne and reared was the descendant of a king. A pretender to the throne of England would be put in a padded room and treated with indulgent humanity. But on the Continent it was not so. Sometimes they put him in prison, and sometimes they put him on the throne he claimed. She knew that her son would no more think of laying stress upon his descent from the Poniatowskis than of asking to be put in

that padded room. But others would think of it and set value on it. Exclusive doors might be closed against the clever speaker, plain John Hanbury, son of an English gentleman, who for whim or greed went into trade, when he was rich enough to live without trade; but few doors would be closed against the gifted orator who was straight in descent and of the elder line of the Poniatowskis of Lithuania, and whose great grandfather's grandfather was the last King of Poland.

After all, upon looking more closely at the affair, the discovery was of some value. No one now could think him over ambitious for his years if he offered himself for Parliament. Younger men than he, sons of peers, got into Parliament merely by reason of a birth not nearly so illustrious as his, and with abilities it would be unfair to them to estimate against his.

There was something in it after all.

If now he chose to marry high, whom might he not marry? Putting out of view that corrupt, that forced election to the throne of Poland, he was a Poniatowski, *the* Poniatowski, and few English families of to-day could show such a pedigree as her son's.

There was certainly no family in England that could refuse an alliance with him on account of birth.

And now vicious people would say he had been guilty of the intolerable meanness of giving up Dora Ashton either in order that he might satisfy his ambition by a more distinguished marriage, or that he might be the freer to direct his public career towards some lofty goal. She knew her son too well to fancy for a moment any such unworthy thought could find a home in his breast; but all the world did not know him as she did, and no one would believe that the breaking-off came from Dora and the cause of it arose before the discovery of Stanislaus' secret English marriage.

When the doctor made his second visit, he pronounced Edith Grace progressing favourably. She was then fully conscious, but pitifully weak. There was not, the doctor said, the least cause for uneasiness so long as the patient was kept quite free from excitement, from even noise. A rude and racking noise might induce another period of

semi-insensibility. Quiet, quiet, quiet was the watchword, and so he went away.

Mrs. Grace had protested against a hired nurse. She herself should sit up at night, and in the daytime the child would need no attendance. Mrs. Grace had, however, to go back to their lodgings to fetch some things needed, and to intimate that they were not returning for the present. Mrs. Hanbury volunteered to sit in Edith's room while the old woman was away. Protests were raised against this, but the hostess carried her point. "I told you," she said with a smile, "that I am very positive. Let this be proof and a specimen."

So the old lady hastened off, and Mrs. Hanbury sat down to watch at the bedside of the young girl. Speaking was strictly forbidden. Mrs. Hanbury took a book to beguile the time, and sat with her face to the patient, so that she could see that all was right by merely lifting her eyes.

The young girl lay perfectly still, with her long dark hair spread out upon the pillow for coolness, and her white face lying in the midst of it as white as the linen of the sheet. Her breathing was very faint; the slight heaving of her breast barely moving the light counterpane. The lips were slightly open, and the eyes closed.

Edith was too weary and too weak to think. Before she had the fainting fit or attack of weakness (she had not quite fainted), she heard the story of the dwarf's misfortunes in a confused way through that sound of plashing water. She was quite content now to lie secure here without thought, in so far as thought is the result of voluntary mental act or the subject of successive processes. But the whole time she kept saying to herself in a way that did not weary her, "How strange that Leigh should lose everything and I gain so much, and that both should be lying ill, all in so short a time!" This went on in her mind over and over again, more like the sound of a melody that does not distress one and may be listened to or not at will, than an inherent suggestion of the brain. It was the result of the last strong effort of the brain at memory blending with the first awakening to full consciousness. "How strange that Leigh should lose everything and I gain so much, and that both should be lying ill in so short a time!"

Mrs. Hanbury raised her eyes from her book and gazed at the pallid face in the sea of dark hair. "She might be asleep or dead. How exquisitely beautiful she is, and how like Dora. How very like Dora, but she is more beautiful even than Dora. Dora owes a great deal to her trace of colour and her animation. This face is the most lovely one I ever saw, I think. How gentle she looks! I wonder was Kate Grace that Poniatowski married like her. If so I do not wonder. Who could help loving so exquisite a creature as this?"

Both of the girl's hands were stretched outside the counterpane.

Mrs. Hanbury leaned forward, bent and kissed the one near her, kissed it ever so lightly.

The lids of the girl trembled slightly but did not open.

Mrs. Hanbury drew back afraid. She had perhaps awakened her.

Gradually something began to shine at the end of the long lashes, and a tear rolled down the sweet young pale face.

"Have I awakened you?"

"No. I was awake."

"Are you in pain?"

"No. Oh, no!"

"You are weeping."

"That," she moved slightly the hand Mrs. Hanbury had kissed, "that made me, oh, so happy."

"Thank you, dear."

No more words were uttered, but when Mrs. Hanbury looked down upon her book her own eyes were full.

The touch of the lips upon that hand had brought more quiet into the girl's heart than all the muffling in the house or the whispered orders to the servants or the doctor's drugs.

"She believed I was asleep and she kissed my hand," thought the girl. No quiet such as this had ever entered her bosom before.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TWO PATIENTS.

DAY followed day in Chester Square, bringing slowly, almost imperceptibly, health and strength back to the exquisite form of Edith Grace. The spirituality lent by illness still more refined the delicate beauty of the girl, and when the colour came back to the lips, and the cheeks lost their pallor, she seemed more like a being new-born of heaven to earth than a mortal of our homely race.

At the end of a week she was still restricted to her room, although allowed to sit up. The fear was not so much of physical weakness as of mental excitement. There was now no need to watch her by night. She seemed in perfect health, in that cool seraphic health of man before the Fall.

And what a change had taken place in the young girl's spirit! Her grandmother had told her that Mrs. Hanbury had insisted on making good the loss they had sustained in the failure of the bank, and more beside.

"I am very rich," said Mrs. Hanbury, "for a woman. I have only a life interest in most of the money my late husband left, and on my death it all goes to John. But I have never spent anything like my income, and John has an income of his own since he came of age. It is not that I will listen to no refusal, but I will hear no objection. I put it to you in this way: Do you suppose if my husband were making his will at this moment and knew of the misfortune which had come upon you and the child, he would insert no provision for you in his will? And do you mean to say that I am to have no regard to what I know would be his wish if he were alive? Remember, you represent the English side of his house. The child is the last of the English side, as John is the last of the Polish side. So let me hear no more of the matter. John has a sufficient income. I have large savings with which I do nothing. Am I to give my savings to an hospital or a charity or to the people of my husband, who left the money?"

Then Mrs. Grace told Edith that Mrs. Hanbury had taken a great liking to her.

"She always calls you 'the child' when she speaks of you, and indeed it seems to me she cares for you nearly as much as if you were her own daughter. She told me she never had a sister or a daughter, and that she barely remembers her own mother, and that all her married life she prayed for a girl-baby, but it was not given to her. And now that she has found you, dear, and me, she says she is not going to be lonely for women-folk ever again, for although we are not of her own blood we are of John's, and we are the nearest people in the world to her except her brother, Sir Edward Preston. She says she has a right to us, that she found us, and means to insist upon her right by keeping us to herself."

And all this helped to make the quiet greater in the girl and helped to heal her.

Then the old woman told Edith that Mrs. Hanbury wondered if she were like that Grace of more than a hundred years back. She said this at dinner one day, and there and then Mr. Hanbury conceived the notion of trying to find out if, in that great portrait-painting age, any portrait had been painted of the beautiful Kate Grace who had fascinated the king. Mrs. Grace always spoke of Poniatowski as though he were a king while he lived in England in the days of George II.

The young man hunted all London to find out a portrait, and behold in one of the great houses within a mile of where she lay, a house at which Mr. Hanbury had often visited, was a portrait of "Mrs. Hanbury and child," believed to be one of the Hanbury-Williams family. Mr. John Hanbury had gone to see the portrait, and came back saying one would fancy it was a portrait of Edy herself, only it was not nearly so beautiful as Edy.

This all helped to cheer and heal the girl greatly. The notion that this Mr. John Hanbury had gone to a great house to see the portrait of her relative, the beautiful Kate Grace, that married the man afterwards a king, opened up fields for speculation and regions of dreams so different from those possible when she was fronting decaying fortune in Miss Graham's, at Streatham, or face to face with poverty

in Grimsby Street, that it was enough to pour vital strength into veins less young and naturally healthy.

She now breathed an atmosphere of refinement and wealth. Her mind was no longer tortured by the thought of having to face uncongenial duties among strange people. She had all her life denied herself friendships, because she could not hope for friends in the class of people whom she would care to know.

Now all this was changed, as by a magician's wand. If in the old days she might have had the assurance of Mrs. Hanbury's friendship, she would have allowed her heart to go out to her, for Mrs. Hanbury, although she was rich, did not think of money as those girls Edith met at Streatham. The girls she met were, first of all, the daughters of rich fathers, and then they were people of importance next. Mrs. Hanbury was, first of all, intensely human. She was a woman first of all, and a generous, kind-hearted, large-natured, sympathetic woman. As her son had said of her, the greatest-hearted woman in the world. Princes and peasants were, to her mind, men, before anything else.

This was a revelation to Dora, who had always heard men measured by the establishment they kept up, and the society in which they moved. There had been only one retreat for her from feeling belittled in the presence of these plutocrats. She would set all store by pedigree, and make no friends. A beggar may have a pedigree equal to a Hapsburg, and a peasant who has no friends, and goes into no society, cannot have his poverty impressed upon him from without, however bitterly he may suffer from within.

And this Mrs. Hanbury, who was so kind and gentle, and who had manifested such an interest in her, belonged to a class of society in which no girl she ever met at Miss Graham's moved, in which any girl she had ever met there would give anything she possessed to move. Mrs. Hanbury's father had been a baronet, and her forefathers before him as far as baronets reached back into history, and her father's family had been county people, back to the Conquest, if not beyond it.

And Mr. Hanbury, who was the son of this woman, had a pedigree more illustrious still, a pedigree going back no

one knew how far. The family had been ennobled for centuries, and in the eighteenth century one of them had sat on the throne of Poland, a crowned king.

She was now under the roof of these people, not as the humble paid companion of Mrs. Hanbury, which would have been the greatest height of her hope a week ago, not as an acquaintance to whom Mrs. Hanbury had taken a liking, but as a relative, as a distant relative of this house, as one of this family!

Oh, it was such a relief, such a deliverance to be lifted out of that vulgar and squalid life, to be away from that odious necessity for going among strange and dull people as a hired servant! There was no tale in all the Arabian Nights equal to this for wonders, and all this was true, and referred to her!

Youth, and a mind to which are opening new and delightful vistas, are more help to the doctor when dealing with a patient who is only overworn than even quiet, and day by day, to the joy of all who came near her, Edith Grace gained strength. The old stateliness which had made her schoolfellows say she ought to be a queen, had faded, and left scarcely a trace behind. There was no need to wear an air of reserve, when there was nothing to be guarded against. She was Mrs. Hanbury's relative, and to be reserved now would seem to be elated or vain. There was no longer fear of anyone disputing her position. There was no longer any danger of exasperating familiarity. She was acknowledged by Mrs. Hanbury and Mr. Hanbury, who would be a nobleman in Poland, and whose forefather had been a king.

She did not try or desire to look into the future, her own future. The present was too blessed a deliverance to be put aside. Up to this there had been no delightful present in her life, and she was loath to go beyond the immediate peace.

While the young girl was slowly but surely mending in Chester Square, the invalid under the care of Dr. Shaw, of Barnes Street, not very far off, was slowly yielding to the summons he had received. The kind-hearted and energetic doctor saw no reason to alter his original opinion of the case. The end was approaching, and not very far off. On

the fifth day after the morning examination, Shaw said, "You arranged everything with the solicitor? There is nothing on your mind, my dear friend?"

"I understand," said Leigh. "How long have I?"

"Oh, I only wanted to know if your mind was at rest. Anxiety is always to be avoided."

"I tell you, Shaw, I understand. How long do you think this will last?"

"My dear fellow, if all your affairs are in order, and your mind is quite free, your chance is improved, you know. That only stands to reason."

"I am sorry I cannot go to Eltham. But that cannot be helped now. She, poor thing, will notice little change, for I have not been with her much of late. Shaw, the last time I was there I promised her a daughter-in-law, and straight-backed grandchildren, and soon she will not have even a cripple son! Poor old woman. Well! well! But, Shaw, send to Chester Square for my friend, Mr. John Hanbury, the man who brought me here, you know. I want to see him alone, privately. He is the only person who knows all my affairs." There was a flicker of the old boasting spirit in the way he gave Hanbury's name and address, and spoke of him as his friend.

Hanbury came at once.

"I sent for you because I have something on my mind; and, as you are the only man who knows all the secret of Mystery Gold, and my deputy winder, I want you to do me a service. Will you?"

"Anything that an honest and honourable man may do, I will do for you with pleasure, if I can possibly," said Hanbury, shocked and subdued by the change in the clock-maker's appearance.

"That man, Timmons, who was to get me the gold, has a place in Tunbridge Street, London Road, across the river. He believes that a man was burned in that fire. He believes my deputy winder lost his life in the miserable fire that destroyed my clock. Go to Timmons, and tell him that no one was lost in that fire, that the winder of the clock is alive, that I am dying, and that the best thing he can do is to leave the country. He will understand, when I am dead, no secrets will be kept. I do not want to

give him up. I have no conscience. But the country may as well be rid of him and me together."

"But, need I go? Can I not send?" asked Hanbury, not liking the idea of such a message from such a man to such a man. It looked like shielding a criminal. Leigh had, according to his own account, coquetted with crime, but kept clear of it.

"No, it would not be nearly so good to me, for you know the secrets, and if he showed any disposition to rebel, you could drop a word that would convince him you were authorized by me, and knew what might be dangerous to him."

"You are asking me too much. I cannot do it."

"Where is your promise of a moment ago?"

"No honest man would assist the escape of this thief."

"Hush! Let me think awhile."

"It is not clear to me, that I ought not to give this villain up to the police, and that you are not bound to give him up. I would do anything I could, in reason, for you; but is it reasonable to ask me to carry a message from you to a man who, you tell me, or hint to me, is a thief, or receiver of stolen goods?"

"I did not regard it in that way. I fancied you would like to rid the country of such a man."

"Yes, by locking him up. I think you are in duty bound to denounce him."

"But, in honour, I am bound not; and honour is more binding on a man than any law."

"But you cannot have any honourable bond with a man like that."

"What about honour among thieves? Even they recognize honour."

"But, are you a thief, that you want to shield yourself under their code?"

"No. I am no thief. I haven't a penny that isn't fairly mine. I told you I have no conscience, at least nothing that people are accustomed to call conscience; but do you think honour does not bind a man to a thief?"

"Surely not about the fruits of his theft."

"I have not looked at it in that way. When a man has no conscience, what binds him?"

"Nothing, except the law of the land, or handcuffs."

"Ah, that is your view. Well, it is not mine. Of course, I have not given you the man's real name or address. I gave you merely a fictitious name and address. Whom did I say? The Prince of Wales, was it, and Marlborough House, or the Prime Minister, and 10, Downing Street? Which was it? I forget."

"Well," said Hanbury, "can I do anything for you?"

"Are you going to Curzon Street on Thursday?"

"No." Hanbury reddened, but he was standing with his back to the light. "The family are leaving town suddenly."

"Are you going too?"

"No." Hanbury was anything but pleased with all this, but who could be angry with a dying man, and such a dying man too?

"If you were going I should like to send a message. But of course you cannot be going if they are leaving town. I told you I have some money of my own. I have made my will since I saw you. After my mother's death all will go, I mean the yearly interest of all will go in equal shares to any hunchbacks that apply for shares. The conditions will be advertised in the papers."

"I think you could not have done better with it," said Hanbury, cordially.

"Yes. When you see her next, tell her I gave up all thought of making Miracle Gold, because she said she wished me. What a wonderful likeness there is between Miss Grace and Miss Ashton. I had not begun to model those figures of time. That clock was getting too much for me. Often when I was away from it, and when I was in bed, the movement was reversed, and all went backwards until the weights were wound up so tight against the beam that something must give way if the machinery did not stop. Then, all at once, the machinery would stop, and suddenly begin running in the ordinary manner, and I used often to shout out and cry with relief. You don't know all that clock was to me. And yet it would have killed me. It has killed me."

"The strain must have been very great. I wonder it did not break you down."

"Yes."

"In reality, though, it was the Miracle Gold did the mischief. Only for it I should not have been away from my clock, or left the gas lighted. I know it is not fair of me to keep you here. You want to go. Say good-bye to her before she leaves town. This is Wednesday. You must not stay here any longer. Will you say good-bye to me also? Two good-byes in one day. One to her and one to me."

Hanbury rose and held out his hand, saying "Good-bye."

Leigh did not stir.

"Are we not to shake hands?"

"Yes, in a moment."

Hanbury waited a while. "I am going now. You have nothing more to say?"

He had not.

He had nothing more to say. He would say no more to anyone. He was dead.

CHAPTER XLI.

FUGITIVES.

HANBURY had, during the past few days, carefully avoided meeting friends or acquaintances. He went near no club and kept in the house a good deal. When he went abroad he drove. He did not wish to be asked questions of the most ordinary kind respecting the Ashtons.

The discovery of his foreign extraction had not yet got abroad, but, although Mrs. Grace and her grand-daughter were under his mother's roof, and they were the only persons besides his mother in whom he had confided, he felt as though every one must know. Such things got about in most unaccountable ways.

That morning he had seen in a newspaper that Mr., Mrs., and Miss Ashton were leaving for a tour in Norway and Sweden. That was all the paragraph said.

At the very moment Hanbury was speaking to Oscar Leigh, the Ashton family were leaving Curzon Street.

When Dora Ashton sat that afternoon in her own room, after writing to her lover, she knew the engagement was at an end, and realized the knowledge. But she had not said anything of it. When she got his answer all was over beyond any chance whatever. He had apologized amply for his offence, and accepted her decision.

His letter had a bracing effect upon her. She had been perfectly sincere in writing her letter and she had never wavered in her resolution of breaking off the engagement, yet deep down in her nature was a formless hope, which she would not acknowledge to herself for a moment, that he might disregard her request and insist upon her re-consideration. But with the advent of his letter, that hope vanished wholly, and she felt more firm and secure. Now all was plain. She should tell her mother, and tell her, moreover, in an easy and light manner. The letter had been a tonic. If he were so easily dismissed, he had not been very much in earnest.

"She went to Mrs. Ashton at once, and said, "Of course, mother, you knew that there was something between John Hanbury and me."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Ashton in surprise that grew as she looked at the girl.

"Well, I have come to say that we have decided it would be better to put an end to it; we have come to the conclusion it would not be for our happiness it should go on any further. It is all over."

"All over! my dear! All over! But I thought it was fully arranged that you were to be married as soon as he had made a beginning in the world."

"I am sure, mother, you do not want me to say more than I wish to say, and I don't think speaking about the affair can do good to anyone. He and I understand each other fully. This is no mere quarrel. At my suggestion the affair has been broken off. I wrote to him, saying I desired it broken off, and gave him my reasons, and he wrote me back saying that he is very sorry, and that it is to be as I wish."

"But, my dear, although I judge by your manner you

are not very much distressed, I cannot help feeling a good deal of concern about you."

"Oh," said the girl with a smile, "you must not imagine I am desperate. I am not, I assure you. The breaking off has been done in two very sensible letters, and we have arranged to be fast friends, and to meet one another as though there never had been anything but friendship between us. You see, mother, there are a great many things upon which we don't agree, and most likely never should, and it would never do to risk life-long bickering. I assure you we behaved more like two elderly people with money or something else practical in view, than two of our age. You know I am not a sentimental girl, and although the thing is unpleasant I shall I am certain never regret the step I have taken in putting an end to what could not otherwise end well for either of us. And now, mother, do me one favour, will you?"

"Oh, yes, my darling. My darling Dora, my own poor child."

For a moment the girl was compelled to pause to steady her lips and her voice. "Do not speak to me again about this until I speak to you, and—and—and don't let father speak to me either."

"It will kill you, child. It will kill you, my Dora."

Again the girl was compelled to pause. "No. It will not. And, mother, don't treat me in any other way than as if it had not occurred. Be just the same to me."

"My darling."

"And," again she had to stop, "above all don't be more affectionate. That would break my heart. Promise."

"I promise."

The girl threw her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her, and the mother burst out crying, and the girl hushed her and petted her, and tried to console her, and asked her to bear up and not to cry.

"I'll try, child, I'll try; but it's very hard, darling."

"Yes, mother, but bear up for me, for my sake."

"I will, dear! I will indeed. We shall not stop here. We shall go away at once."

"Very well. Just what you please, mother."

"I couldn't bear to stay here and see you, my child."

"If you wish it, mother, let us go away at once. Look at me, how brave I am. Do not give way. Do not give way, for my sake."

"I will try—I will try."

The grief seemed to be all the mother's, and the duty of consolation all the daughter's duty.

It is the sorrows of others that most hurt noble natures, and the natures of noble women most of all.

That night it was settled that the Ashtons should go to Norway and Sweden for three months. Norway and Sweden had been put into Mr. Ashton's head by the announcement of Sir Julius Whinfield months ago that he was making up a party for his yacht to go north that summer, and that the Dowager Lady Forcar and Mrs. Lawrence, Sir Julius's married sister, and her husband, Mr. James Lawrence, had promised to be of the party. "We can arrange to meet somewhere," said Mr. Ashton, and so the expedition was arranged.

When John Hanbury left Dr. Shaw's, he thought that now, all being over with Leigh, he was bound in common rectitude to disclose the source of the gold which Leigh had intended passing off as the result of his imaginary discovery in chemistry or alchemy. The simplest course would be to go to Scotland Yard and there tell all he knew. Against this course prudence suggested that perhaps the name and address given were imaginary, and that there was no such man or street. He was not anxious to pass through streets in which he was known, and he was glad of anything to do. How better could he employ an hour than by driving to London Road and trying to find out if any such man as Timmons existed? He did not like the whole thing, but he could not rest easy while he had the name of a man whom Leigh said dealt largely in the fruit of robberies and thefts. At all events, supposing the whole story told him by the dwarf was fiction, no harm could come of a visit to Tunbridge Street.

He jumped into a hansom and was rapidly driven to London Road, and alighted at the end of Tunbridge Street.

Yes, sure enough, there was the name and the place:

"John Timmons, Marine Store Dealer." But how did one get in, supposing one wanted to get in? The place was all shut up, and he could see no door.

A man was busy with one of the many up-ended carts. He had the wheel off and was leisurely greasing the axle-tree.

"Has Mr. Timmons left this place, please?" he asked of the man.

"I think so. Ay, he has."

"Do you know how long?"

"A few days. Since Monday, I think. Anyway, the place hasn't been open since Monday, and I hear that he is gone since Saturday night."

"Have you any notion where he's gone?"

The man stopped greasing the wheel and looked up curiously. "Are you from the Yard too?"

"What yard?"

"Why Scotland Yard, of course."

"No, I am not. Have people been here from Scotland Yard?"

"Ay. And if you was in with Timmons and that crew, you'd better show a clean pair of heels. There's something wrong about a dwarf or a cripple that's missed down Chelsea way, burned up in a fire. Timmons and a cracksman was seen hanging about that place, and they do say that if they're caught they'll be hanging about somewhere else. So if you're in with that lot, you'd better clear out too. They say Timmons has got out of the country. but they'll ketch him by Atlantic cable, and hang him with British rope." The man laughed at his own wit, and resumed his work upon the axle. Hambury thanked him and turned away. He had nothing to do here. The police had information already.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE END.

"WELL," he said, "what is the matter? Oh, breakfast." He put down his newspaper. "I see," he added, "they

have given this fellow Timmons five years, and serve him very right."

"John, you have forgotten something!" she said, stopping him on his way to the breakfast table and laying one of her delicate white hands on his shoulder.

"Eh? Forgotten something? Have I? What? I have a lot of important things on my mind," said he, looking down on the clear sweet, oval face, turned up to his.

"Whatever is on your mind, sir, you ought not to forget the duties of your lips. I have not had my good-morrow kiss, sir."

"I never had anything so important on my mind, or on my lips, Edy, as your kiss, dear." He took her in his arms and kissed her fondly.

"You grow better at compliments as the days go by."

"No dear, deeper in love."

"With such a commonplace kind of thing as a wife?"

"With the most un-commonplace sweetheart-wife in all the world."

"John, I am already beginning to feel quite a middle-aged wife, and my ring where it touches the guard is getting worn."

"That's a desperately serious thing—about the ring, I mean. Gold was too easily-worn a metal to marry you with, Edith. It should have been a plain band of adamant, and even that would not last long enough, dear."

"Are you practising a speech to win a constituency?"

"No. I am speaking out of my heart to keep what I have won."

"Do you know I envy you only for one thing?"

"And what is that?"

"All the love that you give me."

"But we are quits there, for I give all, you give all."

"But yours seems so much richer than mine."

"Does it, sweetheart? Then I am glad of that. For what I give is yours and you cannot help yourself but give it all back to me again."

"Oh, but what pains me is that I never seem to be able to give you any of mine. All you have got from me seems to be only your own going back and I long—oh, my darling, I do long—to show you that when all you gave me is given

back to you I never could exhaust my own. Indeed, I could not, and keeping so much as I have is like a pain."

"Then what must I do to soothe my sweetheart's pain?"

"I do not know. I often think few people know what this love is."

"There is nothing worth calling love that is not such as ours. Love is more than content, more than joy, and not delusive with rapture. It is full and steady and unbroken, like the light of day."

"It is a pain, a pain, a pain! A secret pain. And do you know it is no less when you are away, and no greater when you are near? And it often seems to me that it is not exactly you as you are I love, but something that is beyond speech and thought, and the reason I want you is that you may hold my hand and love it too."

"My Sibyl! My Seer!"

"You and I are, as it were, waiting, and I should not wait if you were not with me."

"But I am with you, and always shall be. You are not afraid of my leaving you?"

"In the vulgar sense? Oh, no! Afraid of your going away and caring for some one else? Oh, no! That could not be."

"No, indeed. No, indeed."

"For I should call you back and show you my heart, and how could you leave me when you saw that there was nothing in all my heart but you? Your pity would not let you do that. You might take something else away, but you could not take away all that I had in my heart."

"You dreamer of holy dreams."

"It is by the firmness of the clasp of our hands we may know that we shall be together at the revelation. I think people coarsen their minds against love. I have heard that people think it is a sign of foolishness. But it can't be. Where, I think, the harm is that people harden their natures against it before it has time to become all—before it has time to spiritualize the soul. It seems to me that this love of one another that Christ taught is the beginning of being with God."

"Surely, child, my child, my dear, you have come from

some blessed place, you have come to us from some place that is better than this."

"No," she said softly. "No. There is no better place for me. I am where God placed me—in my husband's arms."

They had been married a couple of months, and it was June once more. Not a cloud had arisen between them for these two months, or during the months before. John Hanbury's mother said that Edith Grace had the same witchery in appearance as that village beauty of the days of George II., and that some quality of the blood which flowed in his veins made him succumb at once to her; for otherwise how could it be that he should almost immediately after parting from Dora Ashton fall helplessly in love with a girl so extraordinarily like Dora Ashton as Edith? How else could the fascination be accounted for?

Edith herself could give no reason except that things of the kind invariably arranged themselves independently of reason. All she knew was that at first she was disposed to worship him because of his illustrious origin, and gradually she lost this feeling and grew to love him for himself. And with that explanation and him she was content.

He, being a man, could not of course, admit he did anything without not only a reason but an excellent reason too. He began by saying that she was even lovelier than Dora herself, which was a thing more astonishing in one at all like Dora that it counted for more than an even still more wonderful beauty of another type. Then he had been chiefly drawn towards the girl during her tardy convalescence because of her weakness and dependence, and the thousand little services he could render her, which kept him always watchful and attentive when near her, and devising little pleasures of fruit or flowers, or books, when not by her side.

"I do not believe," he would say to himself, "that I was ever in love with Dora. I do think we should never have got on well together, and I am certain when she and Whinfield are married, there will not be a happier couple in England, excepting Edith and me. When I heard that Dora was to be one of the party on the homeward cruise of Whinfield's yacht, I knew all would be arranged before they saw England again. They are most admirably suited to one another.

"But she and I were not. I was always thinking of what I should like her to do and what I should not, and her political views had a serious interest for me, and I was perpetually trying to get her to adopt this, and modify that, and abandon the third. Nice way of making love, indeed!

"I never went forth to her with song and timbrel and careless joy. My mind ran more on propositions and principles. If at any time she said what I did not approve, I was ready to stop and argue the point. I did not know what love was then, and if I married Dora, I should have worn down her heart and turned into a selfish, crusty old curmudgeon in no time.

"But with Edith all was different. I never thought for a moment of what I should like her to do or say or think. I only thought of what the girl might like. I lost hold of myself, and did not care for searching in the mirror of the mind as to how I myself looked, or how she and I compared together. I did not pause to ask whether I was happy or not, so long as I saw she was happy. There was no refinement in the other feeling. It was sordid and exacting. With Edith a delicate subtlety was reached, undreamed of before. An inspired accord arose between us. She leaned upon me, and I grew strong enough to support the burden of Atlas. I flung myself aside, so that I might not be impeded in my services to her. And I was welcomed in the spirit I came. She would take what I had to give, and she would like to take it. And so she accepted me, and all I had, and I had no care in my mind of myself or any of the gifts or graces which had been mine and now were hers. So I had enough time to think of her and no care to distract me from her."

That was his way of putting it to himself when he was in a very abstract and figurative humour. When he was not quite so abstract or figurative, he would say to himself, "It is sympathy, nothing more than sympathy. That is the Miracle Gold we should all try to make in the crucible of our hearts."

THE END.

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